TRANSLATOR/INTERPRETER AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to offer a closer analysis of the translation profession from the point of view of intercultural communication.*

Nowadays, becoming a translator does not only mean mastering at least two foreign languages, but also being a good intercultural communicator. Before being a “writer”, the translator is a “message conveyor”, a bridge between peoples, cultures and mentalities. He/She is an expert in intercultural communication because he/she almost always lives between two different cultures. Moreover, this is his/her major task: to bring people together, to make them understand each other. In fact, translation is a means of seeking knowledge, and it represents an interaction among civilisations through the transfer from one language to another.

Keywords: translation, intercultural communicator, language

Translating “cultures”

In recent years practitioners in a wide variety of fields—scientific domain, academic research, business, management, education, health, culture, politics, diplomacy, development, and others—have realised how important intercultural communication is for their everyday work. Fast travel, international media, and the Internet have made it easy for us to communicate with people all over the world. The process of economic globalization means that we cannot function in isolation but must interact with the rest of the world for survival. The global nature of many problems and issues such as environment, global heat, governance of the Internet, poverty and international terrorism, call for cooperation between nations. Intercultural communication is no longer an option, but a necessity.

The translator, before being a “writer”, is primarily a “message conveyor.” In most cases, translation is to be understood as the process where a message expressed in a specific source language is linguistically transformed in order to be understood by readers of the target language. Therefore, no particular adapting work is usually required from the translator, whose work essentially consists of conveying the meaning expressed by the original writer. Everyone knows, for instance, that legal translation leaves little room for adaptation and rewriting. Similarly, when it comes to translate insurance contracts, style-related concerns are not paramount to the translating process; what the end reader needs is a translated text that is faithful to the source text in meaning, regardless of stylistic prowess from the translator.

However, in a number of cases, the translator faces texts which are to be used within a process of “active communication” and the impact of which often depends on the very wording of the original text. In these specific cases, the translator sometimes finds it necessary to reconsider the original wording in order to both better understand the source text (this also sometimes occurs in plain technical texts) and be able to render it in the target language. This is the moment when the translator becomes an active link in the communication chain, the moment when his/her communication skills are called upon to enhance the effect of the original message.

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The translation process here becomes twofold: firstly, the translator needs to detect potential discrepancies and flaws in the original text and understand the meaning they intend to convey. To do this, the translator often needs to contact the writer of the text to be translated (or any other person who is familiar with the contents of the text) in order to clarify the ambiguities he has come across. Secondly, once this first part of the work is over, the translator will undo the syntactic structure of the original text and then formulate the corresponding message in the target language, thus giving the original text added value in terms of both wording and impact. It is important to stress that this work will always be carried out in cooperation with the original writer, so that the translator can make sure the translated message corresponds to the meaning the writer originally intended to convey. But remember - the translator is essentially a *message conveyor*, not an *author.*

Translators are considered to be intercultural communication experts, mediators, and the bridge between people, cultures, and mentalities. Each translation/interpretation is a challenge not only from the professional, but also from the personal point of view. They meet different cultures and they have to accustom themselves to all sorts of mentalities and general opinions.

In the translation process, there is fulfilled a fundamental role by breaking down language barriers in a world that is increasingly interlinked, at a time when "globalised" communication is fundamental for both international business and social relations. In this line of work, translators have the opportunity to open doors, bringing people, cultures and countries together.

Translation transport ideas and events through time and space in order to make something understood, to accomplish, to prove. In fact, people translate to communicate, transform, and revert. And there should be considered what Tamara Barile, a public translator says: "I translate to touch. Through translation, we gather what human beings think, feel and do. By translating, we make ourselves understood and come closer to together." (*Translation Journal*, 1997).

People live in a universe of linguistic diversity accounted for by the biblical tradition of the Tower of Babel. Since the recent attempts at globalisation necessitate high-level human transactions, present strides towards bilingualism are justified. A translator is a mediator between two different languages, cultural values and mentalities, between two worlds. As an expert in intercultural communication, the translator is by definition an expert whose task is to cross and help others cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. He/She has to master such fields as translation, interpretation, work organisation, procurement of services, and management of intercultural communication processes.

Professional translators must have the competence to acquire, analyse, assimilate and apply knowledge on different levels. In acquiring knowledge they should be prepared to contact experts in other fields. The remarks of Paul Betcke, another professional translator are welcome: "Translation is an interdisciplinary activity. Training should focus on communication and knowledge of society and cultures. Information sciences and knowledge of fields such as marketing, the natural sciences and law should be incorporated to a greater extent in the training." (*Translation Journal*, 1997). Translations indeed represent the place where cultures, previously separated, come together and establish ongoing relations. So, it is quite obvious why translations have become so important and the translator is not just the person who translate words, but the one who can find the best way to transpose the main ideas, so that the intended

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audience gets them right. He/She should also take into consideration the social and political background, within which the translation takes place.

But, these are just a few aspects about what the translating/interpreting profession means. Mastering the vocabulary and the grammar problems of a foreign language are not the only things we need in order to become valuable translators. Indeed, we have all chances to be “second-hand” translators. But we are talking about professionals, and if choosing this kind of job, then we should take into consideration all the other important aspects. We practically give the others the possibility to understand each other. There are required certain skills, as we are the ones who bring people together There are many responsibilities to assume, but the professional satisfaction is enormous.

Culture may cover everything. It means arts, knowledge and sophistication, shared beliefs and values of a group, shared attitudes. Multiculturalism, which is a present-day phenomenon, plays an important role, because it has had an impact on almost all peoples worldwide as well as on the international relations emerging from the current new world order. Moreover, as technology develops and grows everyday, nations and their cultures have, as a result, started a merging process whose end is difficult to predict. Boundaries are disappearing and distinctions are being lost. The sharp outlines that were once clear now are faded.

Translators are faced with an alien culture that requires that its message be conveyed in anything but an alien way. So, they must do a cross-cultural translation whose success will depend on the understanding of the culture they are working with. The process of transmitting cultural elements through translation is a complicated task. Culture is a complex collection of experiences; it includes history, social structure, religion, traditional customs and everyday usage. This is difficult to comprehend completely, especially in relation to a target language, as the specific reality being created is not quite familiar to the reader.

For example, regarding social relationships, there are people used to live with their extended families. A need to address each relative arose. For this reason, there are different words in those specific languages to refer to each relation. There are words to address a wife's mother or husband's sister. This concept of the extended family living together is not quite encountered in western countries. Therefore, the English language lacks the corresponding terms. So, it would be very difficult for a translator to find the perfect correspondent. All he/she can do is to cover the gap between the two cultures and let the reader be aware of the cultural differences. Another example would be the dress code or ornaments used and the symbols behind each of them also pose a problem for a translator. In Asian countries there is a strict dress code which is not applicable for the western ones. Once again, the translator should be the connection between the two cultures whose dressing codes do not have many things in common. Regarding food habits, the very flavor behind a food or its significance is untranslatable to an audience who has never heard of it. The translator is the only one who could express the author’s feelings as faithfully as possible.

Beliefs and feelings change from culture to culture. Religious elements, myths, legends are major components of any culture. They present major impediments in translating a text. This sensitive issue demands the translator's full attention.

So, it can be pointed out that the trans-coding (de-coding, re-coding and en-coding) process should be focused not on language transfer, but on cultural transposition. The translator must be both bilingual and bicultural, if not indeed multicultural. Cultural transfer requires a well-established approach. It is concerned

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with the author's relationship to his/her subject matter and with the author's relationship to his/her reader. These should be reflected in a good translation. The translator must transmit this special cultural quality from one language to another.

Most translations are intended to serve, however imperfectly, as a substitute for the original, making it available to people who cannot read the language in which it was written. This imposes a heavy responsibility on the translator. Awareness of history is an essential requirement for the translator of a work coming from a totally different country culture. Thorough knowledge of a foreign language, its vocabulary, and grammar is not sufficient to make one competent as a translator. One should be familiar with his/her own culture and be aware of the source-language culture before attempting to build any bridge between them.

If the reality being represented is not familiar to the audience, the translation becomes difficult to read. In translations of a culture rich in the proposed specialization, the question of relevance to the projected audience is more significant to the translator than to the original author. A translator has to look for equivalents in terms of relevance in the target language and exercise discretion by substituting rather than translating certain elements in a work. Even with all the apparent cultural impediments, a translator can create equivalence by the logical use of resources.

Translation is an intellectual activity that will continue to thrive, deriving inspiration from fiction in the source language and passing on this inspiration, or at least its appreciation, to target-language readers.

Translator/Interpreter and Diplomacy

With this increasingly borderless world and the subsequent expansion of inter-cultural contacts, the importance of creating institutions to protect cultural and intellectual heritages is becoming a pressing issue. Yet, at the same time, many nations are also seeking ways to develop effective means of conveying their own culture and customs to others. In both instances, language plays a key role, although with the emergence of English as the dominant and global language, the question of how those in the non-English speaking world will protect and project their own cultures, intellectual traditions and languages, is an open issue.

Diplomacy is the art and practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of groups or nations. It usually refers to international diplomacy, the conduct of international relations through the intercession of professional diplomats with regard to issues of peace-making, culture, economics, trade, and war. When one thinks of peace and relief mission negotiations, the most important thing that comes into his/her mind is the high level international accords between the leaders of the various nations. These negotiations are highly visible and use professional negotiators and extensive support staff, including highly-trained professional interpreters.

Communication with other cultures has always been central to diplomacy. Lack of knowledge of another culture may confuse or even offend the people we wish to communicate with, making the conclusion of international or bilateral agreements difficult or impossible. To the extent that without communication there can be no negotiation, communication is obviously integral to the success of the mission. It is necessary for a translator to realise the importance of having a cultural background when taking part o this kind of negotiations, which can affect thousands of people. Errors in translation of peacekeeping negotiations can have a dramatic and costly impact on international missions. Peacekeepers should be prepared to employ professional interpreters when necessary.

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It is important for an interpreter working in the diplomatic field to follow closely world political, social and cultural events. Sources for these aspects may include local and foreign newspapers, journals dealing with current affairs, news broadcasts, as well as a very good knowledge of history and geography. An interpreter is a capable person who is able to translate in both directions, without the use of any dictionaries, on the spot. He/She acts as a cultural intermediary between the counterparts speaking different languages.

Another important aspect is confidence. In diplomatic conferences, confidence in the interpreters is essential. The underlying tensions which may arise between delegates or country representatives can worsen if the interpreters are not trusted. In fact, in certain cases of great tension, delegates prefer to speak in or translate into a language they do not really master rather than passing through an interpreter. This is why it is important to ensure that the interpreters have experience in dealing with tactful situations.

Culture is also a very important aspect in diplomacy. Many peacekeepers have discovered the differences between culture and have also realized the necessity of being familiar not only with the languages, but with the customs and manners of their counterparts in other countries. When peacekeeping partners demonstrate their respect for their foreign counterparts, their communication gains a distinct advantage. There are vast differences among the organizational cultures within the peacekeeping partnership.

People involved in peacekeeping know the importance of understanding another country's business and social customs. They understand the social rules, business practices, negotiating styles, religious customs, language, dress codes and other essential elements of living and doing business in another country. Cultural interpreters help peacekeepers become knowledgeable and well prepared to take part in the customs and activities of the country they are working in by improving experience and confidence in dealing with their counterparts and respecting and observing their main customs and practices.

When conducting negotiations, an interpreter can be one of the key assets. The intelligence, personality, and relevant linguistic competence of an interpreter can be crucial for people who have to get over linguistic and cultural barriers. The interpreter is in fact, a local specialist in public relations. An interpreter can give suggestions on the best way to proceed with a person from a different cultural background, and may notice nuances that would otherwise be overlooked. During the negotiations the bilingual, bicultural expert help navigate linguistic and cultural nuances. After all, interpreting is not a matter of substituting the words of one language with those of another - it is a skill of conveying messages, with their unspoken assumptions, presuppositions, and subtleties.

In conclusion, it is very important for diplomats to realise the importance of having a good interpreter, because the negotiations they are conducting (which sometimes can resume to social peace), have no price and there should not be taken any risk. On the other hand, interpreters should also be aware of the responsibilities they have when dealing with such situations. Any unreasonable word, any mistake can have unexpected effects. Eventually, it is a matter of respecting the profession and according it the required attention.

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