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COMPENSATORY APPROACHES IN TRANSLATION OF CULTURALLY DIVERGENT TEXTS

Abstract

The globalization-induced diversification of approaches to translation has empowered the cultural approach to translation to reassess the reproduction of cultural values in the target culture and reexamine the power relations within the translatorial process. The application of culture-based approaches redefines the function and the purpose of the target text. Building on the principle that languages, in particular those culturally standing apart, perceive and conceptualize world reality and experiences differently, it is tempting to conclude that the significance of these symbols as well as their functions is different from one language to another. It is not surprising then that, in translation, no one cultural cliché can possibly be considered totally equivalent to a cultural cliché in another language system since the associative network of symbols within which the second TL symbol operates will likely differ from that of the SL. Additionally, due to the etymological and syntactic divergence among languages, incongruity of the connotation of the micro-signs between the signifying systems of the juxtaposed languages frequently transpires, making it more problematic for the translator to choose the most apposite equivalent among the alternatives available. Consequently, to reconcile dissimilarities between the signifying systems of languages involved in translation, translators sometimes deploy compensatory procedures in order to transfer the cultural significance that needs special treatment under certain conditions. This approach is further compounded by the fact that presuppositions that are inevitably embedded in an original text are frequently inculcated differently in translation due to different translators' backgrounds. It challenges the manner in which source text cultural values are constructed and rendered in the target text and culture while attempting to illuminate the concealed ideological and discourse practices stemming from the power relations and structures.

Key words: translation, culture, symbol, power, sign, transposition

Broad Overview

This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the importance of culturally conditioned aspects of human communication. Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens hold that language has many functions and takes different shapes according to the situation in which it is used (1964, pp. 77-94). Cultural polymorphism of translation is consequently a quintessentially multi-faceted and multi-problematic phenomenon with different manifestations, realizations and ramifications, which might explain why, in recent years, the focus of translation studies has shifted from endless debates about equivalence to broader issues, including culture and its effect on both the process and product of translation. Culture thus becomes an indispensable and pervasive element in any translatorial consideration. Nida (2002, p. 157) defines culture as “the total beliefs and practices of a society” which opens up vistas about numerous dimensions of translation, many of which go beyond the pure linguistic considerations.

It is worth noting here that the portents of culturally charged symbols, that is, the relation between a sign and its object, “is not wholly established by rules, by a code, as in the case of ordinary symbols”, and “does not preexist with respect to the code, as in the case of indexes, but rather is invented freely and creatively” by virtue of the relation established between a particular object in the real world and what this object invokes in the mind of the hearer/reader (Petrilli, 1992, p. 240). In other words, no matter how well prepared, there will always be certain cultural discrepancies that impede the translator’s progress while rendering the text at hand owing to the illusive extra information hidden in the original text that need not be present as such, or in the same amount, in the end-product in the target language (TL).

Cognizant of the cultural aspects of the source language (SL), along with its denotative and connotative meanings, the translator ought to propose a rendering that reflects closely the original expression’s form and function at the same time, thereby preserving partially the expression’s functions and all the nuances embedded in it. In their recent studies Snell-Hornby (1988/1995) and Bassnett (1980) have shown that the translation process can no longer be seen as being merely between two linguistic systems, but is envisaged as being between two cultures. Consequently, to reconcile dissimilarities between the signifying systems of languages involved in translation, translators sometimes deploy compensatory procedures in order to transfer the cultural significance that needs special treatment under certain conditions. This approach is further compounded by the fact that presuppositions that are inevitably embedded in an original text are frequently inculcated differently in translation due to different translators’ backgrounds.

Reassessment of cultural symbols and diversification of approaches

The globalization-induced diversification of approaches to translation has empowered the cultural approach to translation to reassess the reproduction of cultural values in the target culture and reexamine the power relations. The application of culture-based approaches redefines the function and the purpose of the target text. Building on the principle that languages, in particular those culturally standing apart, perceive and conceptualize world reality and experiences differently, it is tempting to conclude that the significance of these symbols as well as their functions is different from one language to another. It is not surprising then that, in translation, no one cultural cliché can possibly be considered totally equivalent to a cultural cliché in another language system since the associative network of symbols within which the second TL symbol operates will likely differ from that of the SL.

This paper aims to show through discussion of authentic translation examples the importance of pragmatic meanings in human communication. When an American executive places his feet on the desk, the message of authority and relaxation that is being sent is readily understood, while the same gesture in an Arabic country would have a totally different implication, one of disdain and insult. Such implications can be culture specific or culture ubiquitous, meaning that in translation, no one sign can possibly be considered totally equivalent to a sign in another language system since the associative network of signs within which the second TL sign functions will probably differ from that of the SL. That is only one of the aspects of the translatorial contemplation which proves to be a semiotic process in which something symbolically stands for something else, in which different sign systems are coordinated and in which one symbol can semantically encompass another.

Given such starting positions, any particular cultural unit in the SL can become a counterpart match, which puts extra burdens on the translator by acquiring further meaning and connotative charges, especially when it does not avail itself easily to the TL. This conforms to Ponzio's views (1990, pp. 142-146) that although propositions are also no doubt conventional-symbolic, they are based fundamentally upon the relation of representation, that is, upon the iconic relation.

Socio-cultural facet of linguistic sign

If the translator fails to take into account the properties of the semiotic sign as well as its functions in a particular socio-cultural environment on the one

hand and its relationships with other signs on the other, the more global layers, such as genre conventions, could potentially also be altered. As a consequence, in order to reconcile differences between the signifying systems of languages knotted in the translatorial process, translators occasionally undertake certain procedures so as to transpose the semiotic content requiring particular treatment under certain conditions. In order to comprehend a culturally charged symbol, which functions primarily as a linguistic peculiarity, translators sometimes resort to intralingual translation, to use Jakobson's (1959/1992, p. 145) classification, in an attempt to elucidate the polymorphic nature of symbols. Hatim and Mason (1990, pp. 105-106) described several phases during this process, beginning with a) identification, in which the translator pinpoints the ST semiotic entity that needs special treatment; b) information, in which the translator selects an appropriate TL denotational equivalent for the ST sign; c) explication, in which the translator evaluates the denotational equivalent chosen in phase two to see whether it is self-sufficient or not.

If the denotative equivalent turns out not to be culturally compatible, the translator can seek to explicate by means of synonymy, expansion or paraphrase. Perilli's view (1992, p. 240) can also be taken into consideration here that translation "is not wholly established by rules, by a code, as in the case of symbols", and "does not preexist with respect to the code, as in the case of indexes, but rather is invented freely and creatively" by virtue of the relation established between a particular object in the real world and what this object invokes in the mind of the hearer/reader.

Boundaries of meaning compensations

As it is difficult to find a TL sign with the same iconic function, translators sometimes neglect the symbolic function and the association between the target language sign and the signified amongst the users of the target language. In other words, they pursue a generalization strategy. For example, some translators would opt to translate an SL brandy (English) as *rakija* in Serbian. *Rakija* and brandy are definitely not the same, but some salient clues exist at the same level of meaning - they are both ubiquitous in the given cultures and seem to be generic in nature, albeit distilled from different sources.

Such compensatory strides seem to take a great amount of audacity on the part of the translator, but other alternatives are far and between. It so happens that both the SL and the TL, linguistically conceptualize and utilize such a socio-cultural activity in a similar way. From a perception point of view, given that the SL symbol and TL counterpart refer to particular referents in the real world, they invoke in the minds of readers the same vision. It is far from an

optimal equivalent where the elements of the original symbol are chemically not identical, but are comparable nevertheless. Truth to be told, it is quite rare to have optimal equivalents when translating between two languages which are linguistically and culturally distant like English and Serbian, as cultural discrepancies do not usually make it any easier to resort to literal translation unless an 'inebriating' match occurs equally between the SL word and TL world alike, as in the example above.

For such serendipity to occur, the translator needs to a) analyze and describe varieties of language; b). identify and discern all important aesthetical aspects of text and thus interpret and appreciate texts; c). activate processes and experiences of reading along with their intuitive responses to the text at hand; and d). activate all aspects of knowledge stored in their minds on language, text-typological demands, generic conventions, and the sociological roles of participants in the real world and in text, cultural environment, and so on.

In many instances however, the strategy of literal translation would fail to engender a similar word, with identical functions and elements, thus eventually creating a completely different micro-sign that would affect the meanings of the macro-signs, that is, genre and discourse.

A matter of style?

From the earliest writings about translation, such as those of Cicero or Horace, style has often been mentioned but its role has rarely been systematically explored. Hough sees style as the dress of thought (1969, p. 3). In order to be in a position to define style's relation to translation and culture, one needs to contemplate style first as a tool to increase the expressive capacity of an utterance as it is central to the way we construct and interpret texts. Snell-Hornby (1995, p. 119) holds that any attempt to discuss style will be considered unsatisfactory, since first "no coherent theoretical approach is attempted" and second "the problem of style recedes perceptibly into the background". Appreciating the premise that within any language system, given the language universals, the same intention can be encrypted in various linguistic forms, style being one of them, a better comprehension can be achieved if both interlocutors are familiar with all the facets.

In other words, the same proposition can be transmitted in more than one way, thus putting forth a variability achieved by the intonation, type of narration, choice of words and expressions and syntactic structure at higher levels of discourse. Leech and Short (1981, p. 10) define style as "the linguistic habits of a particular writer . . ., genre, period, school". Some may refer to style as a garnish in the semantic load, or, at the opposite end of the spectrum as an

aberration of linguistic norms. Perhaps, the most accurate description would be to see it as an author's personality trait that has found its way into the text (which might explain the old proverb "style is a complicated way to say simple things").

A real problem, however, emerges when stylistic features that are common in one language fail to conform in another. If the translator undertakes to analyze all the stylistic features, such as parallelism, repetition, irony, long vs short sentences, foregrounding vs backgrounding, formality vs informality, nominalization vs verbalization, passivization vs activation, and so on (Ghazala, 2011), his/her task automatically gets much more perplexed than if they opted to take a blind eye to it. Finding a local equivalent can prove to be like looking for a needle in a haystack, while it is questionable if the ultimate reader will be able to recognize the effort and ingenuity and appreciate it fully.

Trendy narratives and temporal implications

Expectations from the audience with regards to translation can come in sundry disguises. Sometimes, they are strictly technical and the observation of the terms and metalanguage is of paramount importance. In other cases, it can be a purist imperative that no foreign words or expressions must be kept. What they all have in common is that they are trendy and have a limited shelf life; what is a convention in one era may be totally proscribed in another.

These days, however, there seems to be a ubiquitous strife to use domestic TL words as much as possible rather than resorting to the unpopular practice of inculcating and legitimizing borrowings. There are times, however, when the translated topics simply impose certain foreign words upon the audience. The current political turmoil in the American administration and the exertions to delegitimize the current presidency have put the word impeachment on the front pages of numerous media. Translators initially hesitated to transpose it as such in Serbian reports, and used the lengthening and diluting translation strategies to translate it as *smjena predsjednika* or *opoziv predsjednika*, but, as time goes by, and the use of the word has persisted in the American political discourse, the cumbersome *impeachment* borrowing is no longer that uncommon.

How long will it take before the borrowed word is actually applied in our political discourse is anyone's guess, but those who bet on the shorter period seem to be spot on. It is not just lack of creativeness on the part of some translators that leads to such egregious transpositions. Political analysts and pundits have a hand in it too. One could just recall how easily the syntagmatic expression *vlast i opzicija* morphed into *pozicija i opozicija*. This severely foreignized rendering does not only cripple the target text in terms of cultural transfer, but it also

distorts the consistency of the translation as it does not coherently fit within the cultural molds. It ought to be observed, however, that while the cultural misfortune in the translation of the original terms cannot be fully ascertained because it deviates significantly from the intended cultural dispatch; the ultimate touchstone of translation is its *skopos*, which can serve as a consolation while giving priority to 'adequacy' over 'acceptability'.

Some lenience should perhaps be taken into consideration since many text analysts (or in the case of the subject consideration - the translators) predominantly rely on their analytical and evaluative skills and their reading experiences and processes so as to discern the language features that have acquired special status in the text and relate these culturally specific idiosyncrasies to their artistic function by analyzing their genre conventionality. Likewise, their instinctive response to the text by triggering their knowledge of all aspects of communication and social relations digs deep into their personal experiences. Such erudition, provides themes with a linguistic perspective to comprehend and appreciate the linguistic features that the original writers deliberately and consciously try to resort to, despite the availability of other alternative options. Boase-Beier (2006, p. 1) holds that "...because the recreative process in the target text will also be influenced by the sorts of choices the translator makes, and style is the outcome of choice (as opposed to those aspects of language which are not open to option), the translator's own style will become part of the target text".

Familiarity with the folklore

Texts can be wrought with culturally delimited meanings and implications. Take the metaphorical meaning for example, where the translator needs to become an inherent insider in the source language culture, which would enable him or her to parse expressions correctly within their own culture, and then subsequently function as an insider in the target language culture to make it possible for him or her to offset the metaphorical value. While fulfilling all those function, they must also be continuously and keenly aware of the culture-based element which operates as an important semantic feature in the source language.

In order to preserve the ingenuity and aesthetics of the source text utmost attention should be paid to the choice between a semantic and a pragmatic representation of the text. In other words, when they diverge, they may advance themselves to both a semantic and a pragmatic handling of the subject to their potential pellucidity and adequacy in the target language. In the case of the two languages that this paper juxtaposes, an appropriate treatment of

conversational acts between English and Serbian is an essential aspect of translation activity. While a semantic handling of a text necessitates imaginative solutions to safeguard adequacy and potential acceptability in the target text, every pragmatic method ought to rely on thorough knowledge of conventionalized conversational norms in the target language to ensure suitability.

Balancing between the two ends (translating literally or deploying a misleading phraseologism) it would appear that the first one is more on the safe side, that is, for as long as phraseological blindness, as in the case of the translation of the title of the British film, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* rendered in Serbian as *Dve čađave dvocevke* does not rear its bizarre head. It is a good example of a failed observance of the phraseological content in the source text, which is totally absent in the target text. Besides, this stern mishap in translating the intended illocution has distorted the wit of the original formulation, thus violating the maxim of quality equilibrium.

Conclusion

Before making the final choice, translators need to explore similar expressions in the target language in order to select one that achieves the same amount of expressiveness without jeopardizing the integrity of the text. If the translator wants to maintain the expressive stratification of a particular expression in English, he or she needs to pursue a wordplay in Serbian that would come close to the proposed wordplay in English. There is, therefore, a dire need to alert translation practitioners as well as translation trainees to the various aspects of cultural meanings and the available strategies to deal with them. A proper balance between the intention and the reception is an essential element. Only then will a translator be able to offer a product that leads to both acceptability and adequacy in terms of what is meant rather than in terms of what is said alone.

This is particularly true in the realm of transferred meaning, as it takes a true serendipity to occur in order for two phraseological or metaphorical expressions to match both lexically and semantically in two genealogically divergent languages. More frequently though, translators are intermediaries in negotiations between expressiveness and literalness. In order for a translator to boldly pursue the expressiveness path, he or she must be genuinely positive that they have considered all the implications and implicatures that such a ploy carries along. Translating *rakija* as brandy is not a perfect match, but at least no one will be offended. Translating *It's all Greek to me* as *To su za mene španska sela* again seems not to give rise to any cultural offence, but the more one ventures into culturally specific and emotionally charged realms, the higher the likelihood that sooner or later a translatorial blooper or blunder will occur. This

reinforces the notion of the need for translators' absolute confidence in their familiarity with both cultures before they embark on a meaning compensation strategy when dealing with culturally divergent texts. Thus, the translator, as the Irish theoretician Michael Cronin nicely described it, is also a passenger, one who roams from one culture to another (2000, p. 24).

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KOMPENZATORNI PRISTUPI U PREVOĐENJU KULTUROLOŠKI RAZLIČITIH TEKSTOVA

Apstrakt

Diversifikacija pristupa prevođenju koja je iznuđena usljed globalizacije omogućila je kulturološki zasnovanom pristupu prevođenju da iznova procijeni reprodukciju kulturoloških vrijednosti u ciljnoj kulturi te da preispita odnose moći u toku prevodilačkog procesa. Primjena takvih pristupa zasnovanih na kulturi redefiniše funkciju i svrhu ciljnog teksta. Nadovezujući se na princip da jezici, pogotovo oni koji su kulturološki udaljeni, poimaju i konceptualiziraju realnost svog okruženja i iskustva na različite načine, uveliko navodi na zaključak da je značaj takvih simbola kao i njihovo funkcionisanje različito od jezika do jezika. Stoga nije iznenađujuće da se, u prevođenju, nijedan kulturološki kliše ne može smatrati potpuno ekvivalentnim drugom jezičkom sistemu u drugom jeziku jer je asocijativna mreža simbola u drugom sistemu drugog, ciljnog, jezika, u drugačijoj funkciji te će se vjerovatno stoga razlikovati od one u izvornom jeziku. Pored toga, usljed etimološke i sintaksičke divergencije među jezicima, često dolazi do neusklađenosti na nivou mikro-simbola između sistema označavanja unutar predmetnih jezika, što prevodiocu otežava izbor najadekvatnijeg ekvivalenta među alternativama koje mu stoje na raspolaganju. Kao posljedica toga, a zarad usaglašavanja razlika među simboličkim sistemima jezika koji su uključeni u interlingvalni prevod, prevodioci ponekad pribjegavaju kompenzatornim strategijama kako bi se izvršio transfer kulturološki značajnih simbola koji u određenim uslovima iziskuju poseban tretman. Takav pristup može biti dodatno zakomplikovan usljed činjenice da određene pretpostavke koje su neizbježno sastavni dio izvornog teksta često bivaju na različit način uspostavljene u toku procesa prevođenja usljed različitih životnih iskustava različitih prevodilaca i sredina iz kojih dolaze. Time se dovodi u pitanje način na koji su kulturološke vrijednosti izvornog teksta predstavljene u ciljnom tekstu i kulturi dok se u isto vrijeme teži ka rasvjetljavanju skrivenih ideoloških diskurzivnih praksi koje proizilaze iz odnosa moći i različitih struktura.

Ključne riječi: prevođenje, kultura, simbol, moć, znak, transpozicija