

Linguistic and Cultural Challenges Faced by Translators

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Abstract—This article attempts to highlight some of the problems faced by translators when the target language belongs to an entirely different culture from the source language. Every society has its own religious, cultural, economic, political, military and scientific parameters. Translations and translators have a significant role in intercultural translation. It is often said that language is the road map to the culture of a particular state, country or region. During intercultural translation, many different processes of cross language interaction take place.

The study of intercultural translation brings forth how we come to know other ways of doing various activities, customs, traditions, methods of celebrating festivals and conversations among people in societies and cultures which are alien to the translator. This paper tries to offer possible solutions to challenges faced by translators during intercultural translation so that they can not only produce an acceptable but a competent translation.

Key words—translation and interpretation, cultural equivalence.

I. INTRODUCTION

What is translation? Barnwell (1986) in her book “Introductory Course in Translation Principles” defines translation as “translation is re-telling, as exactly as possible, the meaning of the original message in a way that is natural in the language into which the translation is being made”. Several linguists suggest that a good translation should include the following criteria: (1) a good holding on grammar and vocabulary of the source language, the text to be translated should be well understood by the translator ; (2) the translator should be proficient enough to reconstitute the source language text (SLT) into the target language text (TLT); and (3) the translation should capture the essence and genre of the original text and should be as close as possible to the original composition Kamil (2014) has highlighted that in order to produce an acceptable translation a translator should master the source language (SL), the target language (TL) and have adequate knowledge about the text he/she is translating. If the translator is not competent enough or he does not apply proper techniques during translation, the result will be an ordinary or run-off-the-mill product without any concern for aesthetics, structures, or for criteria that defined the source

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text. The quality of the translation will definitely be compromised. Even though a translator may be a bilingual or even a multi lingual, translation is not a trivial matter.

II. DIFFICULTIES FACED BY TRANSLATORS

Linguistic Challenges

There are about 7000 living languages currently listed in the world, not to mention the number of dialects existing within these languages. Every single one of them is unique, with own origins, roots and structure. A funny joke in one language can lose all its meaning when translated to another, so if a joke is not translated correctly, the target reader might not actually get the sense of humour implied in the source text. Thus the entire essence of the subject in question might get lost in translation. The next linguistic challenge lies in the correct translation of idioms and proverbs. For example, “to climb on the bandwagon”, an idiom in the English language means, “to gain benefit by supporting another person’s idea”. This expression would be out of context if translated literally into another language. Another factor which complicates the understanding of languages even more is the existence of dialects. The Arabic language is the fifth most spoken language in the world and the official language of 22 countries.

Although spoken by 250 million people in Middle- Eastern and North-African countries, its speakers do not actually all speak the “same” Arabic. Each of these 22 countries has its own dialect, with different variations spoken within the country as well. For instance, it would be difficult for a person from Saudi Arabia to communicate with a Moroccan if they both used their own dialects of Arabic. Thus, translators must be thoroughly competent in the dialects of the source language text and must have considerable knowledge and interpreting skills in order to transmit the intended message accurately, otherwise the essence of the original text will be lost in translation. It takes an advanced level of linguistic knowledge to get expressions, metaphors, jargon and slangs of different dialects.

Cultural challenges

Each population has a way of communicating and expressing its own messages, as well as its own code when it comes to language, symbols, understanding, shorthand, etc. These factors generate a big potential for misunderstanding; cultural factors are therefore another important challenge translators are faced with daily. The cultural context of the country whose language the translators are interpreting has to be taken into account. In some cultures, people communicate very implicitly and you have to read between the lines, while in some others people are much more direct and explicit. This can also be a source of misunderstandings. In other words, translators must be highly competent in the both source as well as the target language.

Several cultural challenges are faced by translators when they take up the daunting task of translating folk songs, mythological dramas, folk tales etc. For instance Mandya district in Karnataka state in India is well known for patronizing dramas and artists. Mythological dramas are staged on a regular basis in villages. Folk theatre, dance and songs are an integral part of village life. During Maramma’s festival, village festivals called “Jatra” are performed with great enthusiasm and gaiety during the September-October for a period of fifteen days. This festival has been observed from the days of the Harappan Civilization because the people of Harappa were called Meluhas or Malavas by

themselves as well as by the Sumerians. The word Mara has become Mahara with the insertion of 'ha' by the Indo-Europeans. According to Oppert (1998), Mara has become the Mala, Maalav, Malaya, Maala, Malwa, Malva, and finally Maalava with harsh "l". Translators must be adept in the local language spoken in Mandya region of Karnataka in order to translate these intricate folk tales, folk songs, plays, customs, traditions of the people of Mandya who celebrate the Maramma festival.

Translating specific content

Translators who must translate specific materials like fiction have to transcribe a whole story, context, world and environment into another language. It involves creativity to transfer cultural values and traditions and to make them understandable and adapted without altering them: the translator has to remain true to the original piece.

When translators are working on translation of cinema, right words and expressions should be chosen to fit the mood depicted in each scene and maintain certain coherence and continuity from one scene to the next. Thus, knowledge of the local culture, language, genre, situation, geographical location etc. plays a major role while translating films.

For books and literary texts, translations are about transmitting feelings, emotions and correctly interpreting words with multiple meanings, so that the fiction travels in an accurate way. Another thing to be kept in mind is that there are many words with multiple meanings in some languages. For example in the Hindi language, the word "accha" has multiple meanings, depending on the tone used by the speaker and the context in which the word is used. The translators must interpret the meaning implied in the source language correctly; otherwise the entire conversation will be lost in translation. If there is implied humour in the source language, then this humour should be transferred to the reader in the target language as well.

It is often hard to keep the writing style intact, which is another challenge translators have to deal with. The same goes for poetry: it should be handled carefully to maintain the implicit message, the writing style and the beauty of the piece. Translating fiction is therefore subtle work and professionals have to pay attention to all the cultural factors involved as well as the purpose of the original piece.

III. HOW TO ACHIEVE CULTURAL EQUIVALENCE IN TRANSLATION

Translation is difficult because a language reflects its culture, and carries its rich cultural connotations. Many difficulties in translation are due to cultural differences. Every nation has its own cultural priorities. Vocabulary of a nation's language reflects its specific culture. Zou (2016) argues that any kind of cultural phenomenon is not isolated, but combines with a variety of cultural elements.

Cultural phenomenon always has the extensive meaning. Culture was born to be imitated and used by others; including vertical transmission (from generation to generation) and lateral transfer (between region and nation). It is important that translators understand the culture of the source language. We often see the text easily, but the translation is wrong due to the lack of understanding of the source language culture. For example, "rest room" in big stores of America or international airports is translated into "the room for rest", but not "the toilet". In different cultures, the same words can have different

cultural meanings. For example, there are the concepts of bats in both English and Chinese language. In western culture, bats have an ugly, evil and bloodsucking image, and the bat-related words are mostly pejorative. However, in Chinese culture, the bat is a symbol of good fortune, health and happiness.

Cultural equivalence in translation is determined by the following four factors: type of the original text, the importance of cultural colour in the original text, the purpose of translation, the reader type of the target text.

IV. STRATEGIES TO BE ADOPTED BY TRANSLATORS

Keeping in mind the difficulties and challenges faced by translators, it is important that translators must adopt certain methods to produce an acceptable if not an excellent translation.

Translators should

1. Never use the method of word to word literal translation. They should adapt the translation in such a manner so as to accurately interpret the meaning of the message.
2. Thoroughly research the genre in which the source text was written before they begin the translation process.
3. Have good communication skills: to transcribe a message without altering its purpose and keep its actual meaning.
4. Adopt the methods of foreignization and domestication as proposed by Venuti (2008) in his book "The scandals of translation: Towards an ethics of differences".

Obediat and Abu Melheim (2017) have reiterated Venuti's definition that domestication includes a method of translation that results in the target text being completely devoid of foreign words thus making it seem as if the target text is written by a local writer. On the other hand foreignization preserves the visibility of the foreign writer by emphasising the foreignness of the source language. Venuti (2008) asserts that the role of the translator should be visible so that the effort he has put should not be neglected. Thus, translation is more than just being bilingual. It is about being able to find the right words to depict the right message in another language, which is a truly rigorous work.

V. CONCLUSION

The exchange of different languages is the exchange of different cultures. The translation of language is essentially a cultural translation; one of the purposes of translation is to establish cultural equivalence between the source language and the target language. Because of the differences between languages, there are many cultural differences between different expressions, and the methods of establishing cultural equivalence in translation are also different. According to different circumstances, "foreignization" or "domestication" methods can be adopted to solve the cultural differences in translation in order to achieve cultural equivalence. It is important that translators thoroughly understand the culture in the source language and try to establish the culture equivalence in target language.

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