CULTURAL TRANSLATION POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract

Translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions. Translators are always faced with the problem of how to treat the cultural aspects in a source language (SL) or source text (ST) in finding the most appropriate technique in conveying these aspects in the target language (TL) or target text (TT). These problems may vary in scope depending on the cultural and linguistic gap between the two or more languages concerned. The aims of the source text will also have implications for translation as well as the intended readership for both the source text and target text.

Keywords: culture, translation, point of view, inevitable,

Introduction

The concept of culture is essential in considering the implications for translation, even though there are differences opinions whether language is part of culture or not, the two concepts of culture and language can not be separated. In 1964, Nida discussed the problems of correspondence in translation, considering equal importance to both linguistic and cultural differences between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). He concluded that differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure. He further explained that parallels in culture often provide a common understanding despite there is significant formal shifts in the translation.

According to him that cultural implications for translation is very importance as well as lexical concerns. Nida's definitions of formal and dynamic equivalence considers cultural implications for translation. For him, a gloss translation mostly typifies formal equivalence where form and content are reproduced as faithfully as possible and the TL reader is able to understand as much as the customs, manner of thought, and means of expression of the SL context. Contrasting with this idea, dynamic equivalence tries to relate the receptor to modes behavior within the context of his own culture without insisting that he understands the cultural patterns of the source-language context.
According to him, problems may vary in scope depending on the cultural and linguistic gap between the two (or more) languages concerned.

It can be said that the concept in cultural translation is “cultural turn” that in 1978 was presaged by the work on Polysystems and translation norms by Even-Zohar and in 1980 by Toury. They dismiss the linguistic kinds of theories of translation as having moved from word to text as a unit but not beyond. They go beyond language and focus on the interaction between translation and culture, on the way culture impacts and limit translation on the context, history and convention. Therefore, the move from translation as a text to translation as culture and politics is what they call a “Cultural Turn” in translation studies and became the ground for a metaphor translation adopted by Bassnett and Lefevere in 1990. In fact Cultural Turn is the metaphor adopted by Cultural Studies oriented translation theories to refer to the analysis of translation in its cultural, political, and ideological context.

Since 1990, the turn has changed to combine a whole range of approaches from cultural studies and is a true indicator of the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary translation studies. As the result of this is called Cultural Turn, and has become an increasingly been interesting in translation. One consequence of this has been bringing together by scholars from different disciplines. It is important to mention that these cultural theorists have kept their own ideology and agendas that drive their own criticism. These cultural approaches have widened the horizons of translation studies with new insights but at the same time there has been a strong element of conflict among them. The existence of such differences of perspectives is unavoidable.

Several Concepts of Cultural Translation

In 1988 Newmark defined culture as the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression, so that each language group has its own culturally specific features. He also introduced ‘Cultural word’ which the readers is unlikely to understand and the translation strategies for this kind of concept depend on the particular text-type, requirements of the readership and importance of the cultural word in the text.
Peter Newmark categorized the cultural words as follows:

1) Ecology : flora, fauna, hills, winds, plains
2) Material Culture : food, clothes, houses and towns, transport
3) Social Culture : work and leisure
4) Organizations : Customs, Activities, Procedures,
5) Gestures and Habits

He also introduced contextual factors for translation process which include:

1- Purpose of text
2- Motivation and cultural, technical and linguistic level of readership
3- Importance of referent in SL text
4- Setting (does recognized translation exist?)
5- Recency of word
6- Future or referent.

He stated that operationally he does not regard language as a component or feature of culture in direct opposition to the view taken by Vermeer who stated that language is part of a culture. According to Newmark, Vermeer's stance would imply the impossibility to translat the SL into a suitable form of TL is part of the translator's role in transcultural communication.

Language and culture may be seen as being closely related and both aspects must be considered for translation. When considering the translation of cultural words and notions, Newmark proposed two opposing methods: transference and componential analysis. According to him transference gives "local color," keeping cultural names and concepts. Although placing the emphasis on culture, meaningful to initiated readers, he claimed this method may cause problems for the general readership and limit the comprehension of certain aspects. The importance of the translation process in communication led Newmark to propose componential analysis which he described as the most accurate translation procedure, which excludes the culture and highlights the message.

Newmark also stated the relevance of componential analysis in translation as a flexible but orderly method of bridging the numerous lexical gaps, both linguistic and cultural, between one language and another.
Some strategies introduced by Newmark dealing with cultural gap:

1) Naturalization:
   A strategy when a SL word is transferred into TL text in its original form.

2) Couple or triplet and quadruplet:
   Is another technique the translator adopts at the time of transferring, naturalizing or calques to avoid any misunderstanding: according to him it is a number of strategies combine together to handle one problem.

3) Neutralization:
   Neutralization is a kind of paraphrase at the level of word. If it is at higher level it would be a paraphrase. When the SL item is generalized (neutralized) it is paraphrased with some culture free words.

4) Descriptive and functional equivalent:
   In explanation of source language cultural item there is two elements: one is descriptive and another one would be functional. Descriptive equivalent talks about size, color and composition. The functional equivalent talks about the purpose of the SL cultural-specific word.

5) Explanation as footnote:
   The translator may wish to give extra information to the TL reader. He would explain this extra information in a footnote. It may come at the bottom of the page, at the end of chapter or at the end of the book.

6) Cultural equivalent:
   The SL cultural word is translated by TL cultural word

7) Compensation:
   A technique which is used when confronting a loss of meaning, sound effect, pragmatic effect or metaphor in one part of a text. The word or concept is compensated in other part of the text.

   In 1992, Mona Baker stated that SL word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. It can be abstract or concrete. It maybe a religious belief, a social custom or even a type of food. In her book, In Other Words, she argued about the common non-equivalents to which a translator come across while translating from SL
into TL, while both languages have their distinguished specific culture. She put them in the following order:

a) Culture specific concepts
b) The SL concept which is not lexicalized in TL
c) The SL word which is semantically complex
d) The source and target languages make different distinction in meaning
e) The TL lacks a super ordinate
f) The TL lacks a specific term (hyponym)
g) Differences in physical or interpersonal perspective
h) Differences in expressive meaning
i) Differences in form
j) Differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms
k) The use of loan words in the source text

Mona Baker stated that it is necessary for translator to have knowledge about semantics and lexical. Because in this case, one would appreciate the “value” of the word in a given system knowledge and the difference of structures in SL and TL. This allows him to assess the value of a given item in a lexical set. One can develop strategies for dealing with non-equivalence semantic field. These techniques are arranged hierarchically from general (super ordinate) to specific (hyponym).

In 1993 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was the one who introduced postcolonialism. Post-colonialism is one of the most thriving points of contact between Cultural Studies and Translation Studies. It can be defined as a broad cultural approach to the study of power relations between different groups, cultures or people in which language, literature and translation may play a role. Spivak’s work is indicative of how cultural studies and especially post-colonialism has over the past decade focused on issues of translation, the translational and colonization. The linking of colonization and translation is accompanied by the argument that translation has played an active role in the colonization process and in disseminating an ideologically motivated image of colonized people. The metaphor has been used by the colony as an imitative and inferior translational copy whose suppressed identity has been overwritten by the colonizer.
The postcolonial concepts may have conveyed a view of translation as just a damaging instrument of the colonizers who imposed their language and used translation to construct a distorted image of the suppressed people which served to reinforce the hierarchal structure of the colony. However, some critics of post-colonialism, like Robinson, believe that the view of the translation as purely harmful and pernicious tool of the empire is inaccurate.

The other cultural theorists, Venuti in 1995 insisted that the scope of translation studies needs to be broadened to take the account of the value-driven nature of sociocultural framework. He used the term invisibility to describe the translator situation and activity in Anglo-American culture.

Venuti discussed invisibility hand in hand with two types of translating strategies: domestication and foreignization. He considered domestication as dominating Anglo-American (TL) translation culture. Just as the postcolonialists were alert to the cultural effects of the differential in power relation between colony and ex-colony, so Venuti bemoaned the phenomenon of domestication since it involves reduction of the foreign text to the target language cultural values. This entails translating in a transparent, fluent, invisible style in order to minimize the foreignness of the TL. Venuti believed that a translator should leave the reader in peace, as much as possible, and he should move the author toward him.

Foreignization, on the other hand, entails choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which excluded by dominant cultural values in target language. Ventuti considers the foreignizing method to be an ethno deviant pressure on target language cultural values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad. According to him, it is highly desirable in an effort to restrain the ethnocentric violence translation. The foreignizing method of translating, a strategy Venuti also termed ‘resistancy’, is a non-fluent or estranging translation style designed to make visible the persistence of translator by highlighting the foreign identity of ST and protecting it from the ideological dominance of the target culture.

In his later book ‘The Scandals of Translation’ Venuti insisted on foreignizing or, as he also called it, ‘minoritizing’ translation, to cultivate a varied and heterogeneous
discourse. As far as language is concerned, the minoritizing or foreignizing method of Venuti’s translation comes through in the deliberate inclusion of foreignizing elements to make the translator visible and to make the reader realize that he is reading a translation of the work from a foreign culture. Foreignization is close adherent to the SL structure and syntax.

In 1996, Simon mentioned that cultural studies bring translation in understanding the complexities of gender and culture and it allows us to situate linguistic transfer. She considered a language of sexism in translation studies, with its image of dominance, fidelity, faithfulness and betrayal. She mentioned the seventeenth century image of “les belles infidels” (unfaithful beauties), translations into French that were artistically beautiful but unfaithful. She went further and investigated George Steiner’s male-oriented image of translation as penetration.

The feminist theorists see a parallel between the status of translation which is often considered to be derivative and inferior to the original writing and that of women so often repressed in society and literature. This is the core feminist translation that theory seeks to identify and critique the tangle of the concepts which relegate both women and translation to the bottom of the social and literary ladder. Simon takes this further in the concept of the committed translation project. Translation project here can be defined as such: An approach to literary translation in which feminist translators openly advocate and implement strategies (linguistic or otherwise) to foreground the feminist in the translated text. It may seem worthy to mention that the opposite of translation project occurs when gender-marked works are translated in such a way that their distinctive characteristics are affected.

With the spread of deconstruction and cultural studies in the academy, the subject of ideology became an important area of study. The field of translation studies presents no exception to this general trend. It should also be mentioned that the concept of ideology is not something new and it has been an area of interest from a long time ago.

The problem of discussing translation and ideology is one of definition. There are so many definitions of ideology that it is impossible to review them all. For instance as Hatim and Mason (1997) stated that ideology encompasses the tacit assumptions, beliefs and value systems which are shared collectively by social groups. They make a
distinction between the ideology of translating and the translation of ideology. Whereas
the former refers to the basic orientation chosen by the translator in operating a social and
cultural context. In translation of ideology they examined the extent of mediation
supplied by a translator of sensitive texts. Here mediation is defined as the extent to
which translators intervene in the transfer process, feeding their own knowledge and
beliefs into processing the text.

In 2002, regarding cultural translation Hervey and Higgins believed in cultural
translation rather than literal one. According to them accepting literal translation means
that there’s no cultural translation operation. But obviously there are some obstacles
bigger than linguistic ones. There are cultural obstacles and a transposition in culture is
needed.

According to Hervey & Higgins cultural transposition has a scale of degrees
which are toward the choice of features indigenous to target language and culture rather
than features which are rooted in source culture. The result here is foreign features
reduced in target text and is to some extent naturalized. There are five elements in
considering cultural transposition such as, exoticism, calque, cultural borrowing,
communicative translation, and cultural transplantation.

1) Exoticism
The degree of adaptation is very low here. The translation carries the cultural features
and grammar of SL to TL. It is very close to transference.

2) Calque
Calque includes TL words but in SL structure therefore while it is unidiomatic to target
reader but it is familiar to a large extent.

3) Cultural Borrowing
It is to transfer the SL expression verbatim into the TL. No adaptation of SL expression
into TL forms. After a time they usually become a standard in TL terms. Cultural
borrowing is very frequent in history, legal, social, political texts; for example, “La
langue” and “La parole” in linguistics.

4) Communicative Translation
Communicative translation is usually adopted for culture specific clichés such as
idioms, proverbs, fixed expression, etc. In such cases the translator substitutes SL word
with an existing concept in target culture. In cultural substitution the propositional meaning is not the same but it has similar impact on target reader. The literal translation here may sound comic. The degree of using this strategy some times depends on the license which is given to the translator by commissioners and also the purpose of translation.

5) Cultural Transplantation

The whole text is rewritten in target culture. The TL word is not a literal equivalent but has similar cultural connotations to some extent. It is another type of extreme but toward target culture and the whole concept is transplanted in TL. A normal translation should avoid both exoticism and cultural transplantation.

In 2004, Nico Wiersema in his essay “globalization and translation” stated that globalization is linked to English being a lingua franca; the language is said to be used at conferences (interpreting) and seen as the main language in the new technologies. The use of English as a global language is an important trend in world communication. Globalisation is also linked to the field of Translation Studies. Furthermore, globalisation is placed in the context of changes in economics, science, technology, and society. Globalization and technology are very helpful to translators in that translators have more access to online information, such as dictionaries of lesser-known languages.

According to him such comments can be extended to the readers of translations. Target text is challenging for a reader, the internet can help a reader to understand foreign elements in the text. So the text can be written in a more foreignising / exoticising manner. He mentioned a relatively new trend in culturally bound elements (some, one might say, untranslatable), are not translated. He believed that this trend contributes to learning and understanding foreign cultures. Context explains culture, and adopting (not necessarily adapting) a selection of words enriches the target text, makes it more exotic and thus more interesting for those who want to learn more about the culture in question. Eventually, these new words may find their way into target language dictionaries. Translators will then have contributed to enriching their own languages with loan words from the source language (esp. English).

According to him translator has three options for the translation of cultural elements:
1- Adopting the foreign word without any explanation.
2- Adopting the foreign word with extensive explanations.
3- Rewriting the text to make it more comprehensible to the target-language audience.

He also stated that cultures are getting closer and closer and this is something that he believed translators need to take into account. In the end it all depends on what the translator, or more often, the publisher wants to achieve with a certain translation. In his opinion by entering SL cultural elements:

a- The text will be read more fluently (no stops)
b- The text remains more exotic, more foreign
c- The translator is closer to the source culture
d- The reader of the target texts gets a more genuine image of the source culture.

He considered these entering loan words into TL as an important aspect of translation. Translation brings cultures closer. He stated that at this century the process of globalization is moving faster than ever before and there is no indication that it will stall any time soon. In each translation there will be a certain distortion between cultures. The translator will have to defend the choices he/she makes, but there is currently an option for including more foreign words in target texts. Therefore, it is now possible to keep SL cultural elements in target texts. In each translation there will be a certain distortion between cultures. The translator will have to defend the choices he/she makes, but there is currently an option for including more foreign words in target texts.

**Conclusion**

A variety of different approaches in cultural translation have been discussed in relation to the cultural implications for translation. It is necessary to understand those approaches to keep in mind about the inevitability of translation loss when the text is culture bound. Considering the nature of the text and the similarities between the ideal of SL or source text (ST) and TL or target text (TT) readers, an important aspect is to determine how much missing background information should be provided by the translator using these methods. It has been recognized that in order to preserve specific cultural references, certain additions need to be brought to the target language or target text. This implies that formal equivalence should not be sought as this is not justified
when considering the expectation of the ideal target language or target text reader. At the other end of Nida’s scale, complete dynamic equivalence does not seem totally desirable either as cultural elements have been kept in order to preserve the original aim of the text. So the cultural implication for translation of source language or source text do not justify using either of these two extremes and tend to correspond to the definition of communicative translation, attempting to ensure that content and language present in the SL context is fully acceptable and comprehensible to the TL readership.

References: