



THE CULTURAL REFERENCES IN TRANSLATION STUDIES AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES IN THE PRATIQUE OF TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the cultural dimension of translation and its effects on the pratique of translation. In modern Translation Studies translation is viewed as a process of cultural intermediation, an attitude that has brought forward the examination of the translation phenomenon in its cultural framework besides its linguistic one, taking into account a series of other factors related to the pratique of translation such as the cultural, social and political parameters. First of all, we will refer to early theoretical works in the field of Translation Studies that indirectly bear the cultural element such as Vinay & Darbelnet's approach (1958). Then, we will describe the development of the so-called "Cultural Turn" in Translation Studies and its basic characteristics. Afterwards, we will describe the methodological approaches as well as the techniques that are proposed by theoreticians for the translation and transference of the cultural references of the ST (Source Text) to the target readership. Finally, we will briefly mention some models of categorization of the cultural elements of a text that translators could take into account in the practice of translation. The overall purpose of the research is to sensitize future translators toward the cultural dimension of translation and propose some methodological approaches that would help them develop their creativity in order to handle effectively translation difficulties owing to cultural differences between the Source and the Target text.

Keywords: Cultural Dimension Of Translation, The Cultural Turn, Methodological Approaches To Cultural References, Translation Techniques, Cultural Categories

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Early Appearances Of Cultural References In Translation Studies

The systematic study of cultural issues related to the theory and practice of translation is not a phenomenon that has appeared recently in Translation Studies. Back to the 50's the French theoreticians Vinay & Darbelnet (1958) referred to the cultural dimension of texts, through their comparative study between the English and the French language. Another important reference to the cultural dimension of translation can be found in Nida's work (1964) where the language is described as a componential element of civilization and words as symbols of cultural phenomena. In the 60's and 70's the theoretical movement of Leipzig School represented by Kade, Jager and Neubert refers to the communicative and situational circumstances of translation, an innovative attitude that highly influenced the development of functional theories of translation in the 70's and 80's. Also, the development of Speech Act Theory by the philosophers Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) provided a completely different methodology of language approach, according to which language and its use depend on social and communicative factors, influencing, indirectly, the advances in translation theory. Although the above-mentioned theoretical approaches do not refer closely to the cultural dimension of translation, their contribution to the field of Translation Studies is undoubtedly significant since they constitute an early approach of the cultural dimension of the translation phenomenon.

Snell-Hornby examines the importance of the cultural dimension of translation in a broad sense, as a shift in the disciplinary paradigm from purely linguistic approaches to approaches that incorporate in their study the socio-cultural environment of translation, as well as ways in which the translation functions, it is received and interpreted in its reception environment. Within the above-mentioned framework, Snell-Hornby mentions that the Functional theories of translation that were developed in Germany, Finland, Israel and Holland almost simultaneously, constitute the beginning of the so-called "Cultural Turn" in the field of Translation Studies. The most important Functional theories are Skopos Theory developed by Reiss & Vermeer (1984), the Theory of Translational Act developed by Holz-Mänttari (1984) and the Text-Typology theoretical models developed by Reiss (1976). Although the above theories focus on different aspects of the translation event, their common element is that they are target-text oriented examining how a translation functions within the civilization of its reception.

According to Skopos Theory, a translation depends closely on the purpose that aims to achieve in its reception environment. The purpose and function of the text to be translated may differ from that of the original text (*function alteration*) in which case translation shifts are mandatory in order to achieve the

purpose of the target-text. Some translation shifts are also necessary even in cases where the purpose of a translation remains the same as that of the original text (*function constancy*). Consequently, Skopos Theory gives priority to the target-text and not to the source-text, based on the assumption that a translation must be done on the basis of the purpose that is required to achieve, to be agreed in advance between the translator and the client (*commissioner*) during the commission process of a translation task. As a result, Skopos Theory is deeply oriented to cultural factors and we could characterize it as the first systematic attempt to describe what we nowadays call “cultural mediation”. In the framework of the particular approach, Vermeer (1986) was the first to have named translation as “cultural transfer”. In short, with Skopos Theory the ideal of achieving accuracy in the translation of the original text is abolished, whereas the idea of functional adequacy of the translated text comes to the foreground.

Another important Functional theory is the Theory of Translational Act that was developed as a reaction against the traditional attitude according to which translators are, in fact, passive observers who simply speak and understand two languages. The Theory of Translational Act considers translation not as a simple linguistic transference, but, mostly, as a set of actions performed by the translator, ranging from his effort to understand the source-text and its linguistic and cultural features, as well as the act of communication among the translator and all those involved in the translation process. Consequently, the translator assumes a very active role and acquires a dynamic profile, taking into account the specific needs both of the text to be translated and its users as well.

Further development of the cultural approach in Translation Studies came from the field of Literary Studies and, more specifically, the postmodern theories that were developed in the 60's and 70's. Barthes' post-structuralist approach and Derrida's deconstruction theory are among those approaches that have mostly influenced the scientific field of translation in the 80's 90's. Barthes talks metaphorically about “the author's death”, implying that the meaning of a text does not depend on the author's intentions but on its readers, each of which can give his own interpretation to the text. Derrida's theory is almost similar to Barthes' approach according to which, texts do not have a steady, predetermined meaning, whereas, this is reformed every time the text is read by different recipients.

2. THE CULTURAL TURN IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

2.1. The Term “Cultural Turn”

The term “Cultural Term” was officially introduced by Bassnett in the introductory section of the collective Volume that she and Lefevere published under the title “Translation, History and Culture” (1990). The articles that were published in this volume included the announcements presented at a conference that took place in Warwick of Great Britain in 1988. Among the main subjects that were examined were the cultural element in the translation process, its effect on the target readership and ideological matters of the translation process.

2.2. Basic Characteristics of the Cultural Turn

The most important aspect of the Cultural Turn that was developed in the 90's can be summarized as the abandonment both of the linguistic approach of translation and the exploration of purely linguistic matters and terms such as equivalence and fidelity. Under these circumstances, researchers attempt to approach basically the cultural framework, then, the act of translation as a communicative event and, finally, the text itself. Research is centered around the interaction between translation and civilization, as well as the way in which cultural differences influence the translation process.

According to Wolf (2002), the Cultural Turn has managed to bring to the foreground the concept of civilization as a dynamic and complex factor changing constantly and the concept of translation as a “third place”, an intermediary field among civilizations. Within this “third place” the translator undergoes the pressure of the civilization involved and he does not simply transfer cultural elements from one civilization to another, but he can actually create even a new one by incorporating the two civilizations, that of the ST and that of the TT.

The Cultural Turn reflects a general tendency that appears in Humanistic Studies at the end of the 80's and the beginning of 90's and it has highly contributed to an important change regarding the way of approaching a series of traditional matters in other scientific fields, as well. It actually constitutes a massive spiritual phenomenon deriving from the need for cultural awareness, while, it is closely related to the phenomenon of globalization and the increasing need for quality translations. It is believed to have provided the

methodological tools for a complete understanding of the complicated procedure of transference from one language to another and the changes those texts undergo while moving to new environments.

However, we should note that although translation adopts tools and concepts from Cultural Studies, this does not happen the other way round. Bassnett's proposals for common action between the two scientific fields have not been embraced by Cultural Studies. According to Triverdi (2005), a possible explanation is that, despite the similarities and common characteristics between these two scientific domains, their main difference is that Cultural Studies examines the cultural element on a theoretical level and only in one language, that is English. On the other hand, Translation Studies presupposes two working languages, one of which could be English.

3. CLASSIFICATION OF CULTURAL ELEMENTS

3.1. Newmark's Taxonomy

The basic issue that is raised regarding the culture-specific elements, culture-bound concepts and cultural words is whether they are easily detectable. Newmark (1988) believes that there are different forms of culture in a civilization and proposes the following cultural categories:

Ecology: it includes, winds, plains and hills. Regarding some categories of ecological cultural elements, Newmark mentions that Nida supports that some of the elements of the ecosystem such as seasons, the rain and different kinds of hills cannot be made understood in the process of translation and that, in relation to this, the T.V. will constitute soon an international explanatory power.

Material culture: it regards the following: a. food, b. clothes, c. houses and towns d. transport.

Social civilization: it includes work and leisure time and generally everything that is related to every day life that can take different forms in various civilizations.

Organisations, customs, activities, procedures and concepts. They include the political and administrative element, the religious and the artistic element that can present very important differences from one culture to another.

Gestures and habits: gestures and habits that occur in some cultures and not in others.

As a general remark, Newmark concludes that the translator of a cultural word that is always less context-bound than an ordinary word has to take into account factors such as the motivation and the cultural specialist in relation to the text's topic as well as the linguistic level of the readership.

3.2. Katan's Taxonomy

In addition to the above-mentioned classification that can be very helpful in spotting the cultural elements of a text, we will briefly refer to the categorization of cultural elements developed by Katan (1999). These categories provide a general conceptualization of cultural elements and help broaden someone's knowledge regarding the concept of civilization. Katan, distinguishes the following categories, in accordance, in most parts, with the previously mentioned Newmark's categorization.

- ✓ Environment
- ✓ Behaviour
- ✓ Skills, strategic and communicative skills, linguistic or not
- ✓ Values and hierarchies of society
- ✓ Attitudes
- ✓ Identity

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH OF THE CULTURAL ELEMENTS IN THE PRATIQUE OF TRANSLATION

We could distinguish between two basic methodologies with which the cultural elements of a text are approached: the micro constructive and the macro constructive methodology.

4.1. Micro Constructive Methodology

4.1.1. The Distinction Between Domestication And Foreignization

On the level of micro constructive approaches, we could distinguish between two main strategies, namely, foreignization and *domestication*. As far as *foreignization* concerns, this is a strategy aiming to maintain the foreign and different element in the practice of translation, bringing the target audience more closely to the source-text. *Domestication* is the strategy aiming to adapt the original text to the target-language, so that the audience acquires the sense of reading something familiar to their own culture, and not something foreign and unfamiliar to them. These two main strategies were described and accurately discussed by Venuti (1995) claiming that the choice between the two is a matter of ideology. In the practice of translation, we usually meet with a *strategic hybridity* since in every translation it is likely to have the two strategies coexisting, although one of the two prevails, usually the one that is applied in most parts of the text.

4.1.2. Vinay's and Darbelnet's Methodology

Another model of translation strategies in the framework of micro constructive approaches is Vinay's and Darbelnet's methodology that is presented in their work *Stylistique Comparée du Français et de l'Anglais* and it constitutes the base model for all translation models being developed afterwards. Their model differentiates between *direct* and *oblique* translation. As *direct* translation the authors mean the strategy of literary translation of a text, while by the term *oblique* translation they mean a free approach of translation. In both strategies seven translation techniques correspond, respectively. In particular, three of them correspond to *direct* translation and four to *free* translation.

The techniques under the *direct* translation are the following:

Emprunt: the direct adoption of the foreign word to the target-text either because these words have been established in the target-language, i.e. computer, video, or because there is not a culturally equivalent word in the target-civilization i.e. pub, café, bistrot e.tc.

Calque: the literal and precise translation of a word or expression.

Literary translation: translation without any change in any level, such as syntactic, grammatical, with proper semantic transference. i.e. "to have a word on the tip of my tongue" is translated literarily in French as "avoir un mot sur le bout de la langue".

The above mentioned is the most preferable technique, on condition that the linguistic structures of the target-language allow the application of the particular way of translating without any distraction of the meaning.

The techniques under the *oblique* translation are the following:

Transposition: change of grammatical category without any change of meaning, i.e. the noun becomes verb and adverb, the adjective noun or verb e.t.c.

Modulation: change in attitude without any change of meaning, i.e. the concrete noun is translated by an abstract noun, the affirmative type of a verb is translated by a negative one, the passive voice is translated as active e.t.c.

Equivalence: two languages describe the same circumstance/object with different linguistic or stylistic means. According to Vinay & Darbelnet, equivalence is the case under which two languages describe the same situation by different stylistic and structural means. This technique is mainly used for the translation of idioms and proverbs, but not exclusively for this purpose.

Adaptation: total shift of the cultural references when these do not exist in the target-civilization.

4.1.3. Harvey's Techniques

Harvey (2003) proposes four techniques:

- ✓ *Functional equivalence*: finding a term or an expression that will be functioning in an equivalent way to the target-language
- ✓ *Formal equivalence*: literal translation
- ✓ *Transcription or borrowing*: the word of the source language remains in the target-language

✓ *Descriptive or self-explanatory translation*: using a description or an explanation and

4.1.4. Newmark's Taxonomy

One of the most complete translation models including a detailed categorization of methods for the translation of cultural references of a text is Newmark's model (1988) that consists of twelve techniques, some of which coincide with Vinay and Darbelnet's methods. It is worth mentioning that Newmark's model has been widely accepted in the field of Translation Studies as the most representative of the microstructural approach for the translation of cultural elements.

Transference: the process of transferring a SL word to a TL text as a translation procedure. This is called a "loan word" that is adopted without any phonological or morphological change i.e. STOP, gadget.

Naturalization: a procedure that adapts the SL word first to the pronunciation and then to the morphological conventions of the TL. i.e. humeur, Edimbourgh.

Cultural equivalent: the use of a relative or almost relative word for the translation of a special cultural reference that does not exist in the target civilization. The English word "pub" is translated in Greek as "biraria" which in back-translation means "a place to drink beer".

Literal translation: the translation that follows closely the form and meaning of the source-text without creating any misinterpretation in the target-language. Some transparent institutional terms are translated literally in Western European languages even though the TL cultural equivalents have widely different functions. This regards some concept-words such as "realism" and "actualization" that are translated literally and often misleadingly as their local connotations are often different.

Neutralization: transferring a source-text in a more simplified form to the target-language. i.e. the English expression "I have a split tongue" is translated in Greek as "μιλώ διαφορεόμενα" that in back-translation means "I speak in an ambiguous manner".

Label: a provisional translation, usually of a new institutional term through the use of inverted commas, that can later be discreetly withdrawn.

Componential analysis: the analysis of a lexical unit into its sense components due to lack of its equivalent term in the target language. i.e. the English word "cosy" is translated in Greek as "ζεστό και άνετο" which in back-translation means "warm and comfortable".

Deletion: the omission of words or segments of the source structure aiming to avoid misinterpretations or stylistic errors.

Couplet: the combination of two, three or four techniques for dealing with a single problem in translation.

Accepted standard translation: automatic translation of a term or an expression based on the widely acceptable translation that has already been established.

Notes, Additions, Glosses: additional information in translation, depending on the requirements of the target readership and such information can normally only be given outside the version. Additional information in the translation can take various forms such as: notes at bottom of the page, notes at the end of a chapter, notes or glossary at the end of the book.

Classifier: the use of an additional word in order to specify another concept when there are problems in understanding the meaning of this word. i.e. "in Speyer" is translated as "in the city of Speyer".

Newmark notes that in the process of translating cultural words and institutional terms, the most appropriate solution depends not so much on the linguistic or situational context as on the readership that he distinguishes in three categories (the expert, the educated generalist and the uninformed) and on the setting.

4.2. Macro Constructive Methodology

The macro constructive methodological approaches focus on the text as an entity. The oldest and most traditional macro constructive approach is the Hermeneutic approach developed by Steiner in his work *After Babel* (1975), according to which translation is an hermeneutic action, where translators comprehend the original text based on their personal experiences, their own cultural attitudes and background. His proposal is based on the belief that within a text there is a meaning awaiting to be discovered and be written from the beginning. It should be stressed, however, that his hermeneutic theory does not constitute a methodological

approach in its narrow sense and does not provide any specific methodological tools to apply in the practice of translation. Hence, we only make a short reference in this article without wishing to underestimate the contribution of his methodological approach to the development of Translation Studies.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study has examined the cultural dimension of translation and its implications for the practice of translation. Languages depict to a great extent culture and, therefore, culture words cannot be clearly interpreted and transferred to the target civilization without familiarity with the original cultural phenomenon. In this article it is illustrated how crucial it is firstly to identify the cultural elements in the ST and secondly to select the most appropriate methodological approach in order to render the TT culturally natural to its recipients.

The micro constructive and the macro constructive methodological approaches that have been described have both advantages and disadvantages by emphasizing one methodological dimension of the translation process at a time. Consequently, it is proposed that they function as complimentary and not as potential random choices in the translation process. It is also recommended that some of the above-mentioned techniques could be introduced at the early stages of translator training and could be further developed at advanced levels when students will have already acquired a certain degree of translation competence.

Moreover, the establishment of the cultural dimension of translation in the field of Translation Studies arises certain matters related to translator training and the structure of academic translation programmes. It is quite important that students perceive the translation phenomenon as a multidimensional and complicated activity with socio-cultural implications, and not as a purely linguistic activity. The role teachers of translation are asked to perform in this respect has considerably changed. The integration of the cultural dimension in the teaching of translation is imperative so that students cultivate as future translators not only their linguistic skills but, most importantly, their social and cultural competences that would help them build a strong profile as professionals in the translation industry.

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