TRANSLATING CULTURE[1]

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Abstract

Culture is inextricably bound to translation. Transferring culture from a source text (ST) to a target text (TT) is a fundamental aspect of the phenomenon of translation. Translators are entrusted with the task of bridging cultural differences and enabling TT receptors to understand the original message in its entirety, just like its ST receptors. Taking into consideration the wide array of culture-specific terms present in each language, it only follows logically that, sometimes, these terms can be notoriously difficult to translate. However, many translation theorists purport that difficult though it is to handle culture-specific terms in translation, it is not entirely impossible. In that respect, they classify the culture-specific terms in various domains and propose numerous translation strategies for rendering culture-specific terms (e.g. borrowing, adaptation, explanation, generalization, reduction, etc.), their general tendency being either towards 'domesticating' or 'foreignising' the translated text as a whole.

Key terms: translation, culture-specific terms, strategies

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[1] review scientific paper

INTRODUCTION

Culture goes hand in hand with language and is a fundamental aspect of translation. The task of translators is not merely to translate a text; they need to strive to preserve the same impact and to evoke the same feelings and reactions on the part of the target text receptors, just as the original text has done in the case of the source text readership. In doing that, translators invariably need to handle the transference of culture, i.e. the culture aspects of the original text into the translated text with special deliberation and care (Nida, 1964.).

In addition to the general consensus regarding the significance of translating culture, two general approaches seem to recur repeatedly in translation literature – the 'foreignising' and 'domesticating' approach. According to the former, the receptors might find themselves in a position not to understand the translated text completely because of the foreign elements that have been transferred from the source text and preserved in it. In that case, they are at least exposed to the foreign elements, and, thus, are in a position to expand their viewpoints with new, insightful information about the foreign culture. Conversely, the latter approach gives prominence to the target language and culture. Consequently, the receptors are led to relate to concepts and modes of behavior familiar to them and relevant to their own culture. The advantage of this approach is that the receptors will most probably have a much better understanding of the text as a whole, as the foreign elements will be replaced by domestic ones; however, the likelihood for them to arrive at new revelations related to the foreign culture is minimal (Venuti, 1995).

In discussing culture – translation interface, the focus is mainly placed on translating words, phrases and expressions which originate in a particular culture and are non-existent in another culture. That is exactly why, traditionally, culture specific terms (CST) are regarded as a potential source of untranslatability. Translation theorists who have dealt with this issue, in general, contend that CST are manageable, i.e. translatable; still they point out that CST call for special treatment and that translators need to be well-equipped with ample knowledge of both source and target language/culture (SL/C and TL/C) to be able to handle the transference effectively.

Assuming this highly pertinent role of mediators between SL/C and TL/C, translators are obliged to take into account a host of factors, among which the principal ones are decidedly the profile of the target text receptors as well as the

directions, expectations and goals of those who have commissioned the translation in the first place.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

The following sections address several questions closely related to the issue at hand: "*What is culture?*"; "*What items qualify for CST?*", and "*What translation strategies can be applied in overcoming translation problems related to CST?*"

What is culture?

There are numerous definitions of the term *culture*. Larson (1984), for instance, defines culture as "a complex set of beliefs, attitudes, values, and rules which a group of people share". In his definition of culture Newmark (1988) states that culture is "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression". Duranti (1997) (in Durdureanu, 2011) views culture as "something learned, transmitted, passed down from one generation to the next, through human actions, often in the form of face-to-face interactions, and, of course, through linguistic communication".

Komissarov (1991) contends that "people who belong to the same linguistic community are members of a certain type of culture, and, consequently, they share many traditions, habits, ways of doing and saying things. In fact, they have much common knowledge about their country, its geography, history, climate, its political, economic, social and cultural institutions, accepted morals, taboos and many other things, and all of that enables them to produce and understand messages, i.e. to establish meaningful communication with other people". In this respect, he further explicates that in interlingual communication between members of two different cultures this common knowledge may be seriously limited, which, in turn, presents a serious obstacle to understanding.

On the basis of all of the abovementioned definitions of culture it can be inferred that translation between different cultures and languages, on the one hand, is literally unavoidable, and, on the other hand, must be approached very tentatively due to its delicate nature. Namely, translators need to understand the beliefs, attitudes, values and rules of the source language audience in order to

adequately translate them for people who have a different set of beliefs, attitudes, values and rules, i.e. belong to a distinct culture community.

What items qualify for culture-specific terms?

Transposing culture from the ST to the TT, manifestly implies replacing words, phrases and expressions specific to a given language and culture with suitable words, expressions and phrases from another language and culture. Languages encompass plenty of such linguistic items and this issue has been frequently tackled by many translation theorists and practitioners, which accounts for the abundance of expressions used to refer to these terms (e.g. *cultural words* (Newmark, 1988), *culture-specific concepts* (Baker, 1992)*, realia* (Robinson, 1997), *culture-bound phenomena and terms* or *culture-specific items* (Schäffner, Wiesemann, 2001), *culturem* (Lungu Badea, 2004), etc.) (in Shiryaeva & Lungu Badea, 2014).

Aixela (1996) refers to them as *culture specific terms* (CST) and defines them as "elements of the text that are connected to certain concepts in the foreign culture (e.g. history, art, literature) which might be unknown to the readers of the TT". In an attempt to delineate CST, Baker (1992) underlines the following three general features of CST: 1) the concept that a CST represents is totally unknown in the target culture; 2) the expression does not have any true equivalent in the target language; 3) the concept expresses a particular fact that is closely linked with a specific culture, its habits, language or environment.

Another salient aspect of CST is that literature abounds in attempts at producing neat typologies of the different types of CST. Thus, Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) suggest that some CST appear in areas of culture such as: time division, jobs, positions and professions, food, drink, baking, particular aspects of social life, etc. Catford (1964) discusses CST that refer to measurements, coins, institutions, clothing, etc. He also confirms that all these terms differentiate one community from another and are difficult to translate. Santoyo (2010) adds CST pertaining to certain sports, dances, musical and artistic terms (in Durdureanue, 2011).

Newmark (1988) distinguishes five domains for classifying culture words: 1) ecology (flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills); 2) material culture (food, clothes, houses and towns, transport); 3) social culture (work and leisure); 4) organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts (political and administrative, religious, artistic, etc.), and 5) gesture and habits. Fernández

Guerra (2012) organizes CST in four major domains:1) geographic and ethnographic terms; 2) words or expressions referring to folklore, traditions and mythology; 3) names of everyday objects, actions and events (such as food and drinks, clothes, housing, tools, public transport, dances and games, units of measurement, money, etc.); 4) social and historical terms denoting territorial administrative units or divisions; departments, professions, titles, ranks, greetings and treatments; institutions, patriotic and religious organizations, etc.

Ku's (in Fernandez Guerra, 2012) classification of CST includes: 1) environment, including ecology, place names, etc.), 2) cultural heritage (religious beliefs, historical events, characters, festivities, folklore, housing, objects, etc.), 3) social culture (conventions, beliefs, habits, social organizations, etc.) and 4) linguistic culture (fixed expressions, idioms, insults, etc.).

Evidently, there is a wide array of different types of CST which belong to different domains referring to both objects and concepts related to a particular culture. Naturally, some of these concepts and objects simply exist and reflect the reality of one culture, but are non-existent in another one, as what is important to one might not be important to another culture. Moreover, in some cases, similarities can be traced in different cultures, but still these concepts and objects might not be fully equivalent to each other in the end. Hence, translators bear a great responsibility in handling CST – first, they need to adequately comprehend, and, then, suitably transfer CST from SL to TL. This requires a thorough investigation of the history, sociology, economy and ideology not just of the text they are translating but of the context in which that text has been produced. That puts translators in a strenuous position to decide whether it is more convenient and appropriate to remain loyal, i.e. faithful to the original text ('foreignisation'), or to give priority to the target recipients and bring the text closer to their language and culture ('domestication').

What translation strategies can be applied in overcoming translation problems related to CST?

Given the complex nature of the issue investigated in this study – the translation of CST – different translation theorists (Newmark, 1988; Baker, 1992; Pedersen, 2011; Fernadez Guerra, 2012; etc.) have proposed a number of translation procedures or strategies for rendering CST. Although most of these strategies refer, more or less, to the same phenomenon, still no consensus has been reached among researchers regarding the terminology that should be used

to refer to them. In other words, very frequently, different terms are used by different researchers for what in essence is one and the same strategy.

In this paper decided to focus on Fernandez Guerra's (2012) classification of translation strategies used for dealing with CST in the translation process. This classification, to the best of our knowledge, is one of the most recent and also one of the most comprehensive classifications as it offers a very neat summary of the translation strategies put forward by various researchers. It comprises the following 15 translation strategies:

1. **Adaptation** is replacing a SL cultural element by another term from the TC. The basic goal of the translator when trying to 'adapt' the translation is to have a similar effect on the TL readers.

2. **Borrowing** is taking a word or expression straight from another language, without translation. The procedure is normally used when a term does not exist in the TC, or when the translator tries to get some stylistic or exotic effect. It can be "pure", if there is no change of any kind in the foreign term, or "naturalized", if the word has some change in the spelling, and perhaps some morphological or phonetic adaptation.

3. **Calque** could be described as a literal translation (either lexical or structural) of a foreign word or phrase. It could actually be considered a special type of loan or borrowing, since the translator borrows the SL expression or structure, and then transfers it in a literal translation. The difference between loan/borrowing and calque is that the former imitates the morphology, signification and phonetics of the foreign word or phrase, while the latter only imitates the morphological scheme and the signification of that term, but not its pronunciation.

4. **Compensation** introduces a SL element of information or stylistic effect in another place in the TL text, because it cannot be reflected in the same place as in the SL.

5. **Compression/reduction/condensation/omission** happens when the translator synthesizes or suppresses a SL information item in the TL text, mainly when that information is considered unnecessary because the cultural term does not perform a relevant function or may even mislead the reader.

6. **Description** is when a term or expression is replaced by a description of its form or function. It could, thus, be regarded as a sort of paraphrase, or even as an amplification or explanation of a SL term.

7. **Equivalence** refers to a strategy that describes the same situation by using completely different stylistic or structural methods for producing equivalent texts. This basically means that the translator uses a term or expression recognized as an established equivalent in the TL. It is similar to adaptation and to modulation in that it expresses the same situation in a different way.

8. **Explicitation/expansion/amplification/diffusion** means that we express in the TL something that is implicit in the context of the SL, or that we introduce details that are not expressed in the SL, such as more information, translator's notes, or explicative paraphrasing.

9. **Generalization** – the translator uses hypernyms or more general or neutral terms, normally for stylistic reasons, or to avoid unnecessary repetitions or ambiguity.

10. **Literal translation** or word for word where there is direct transfer of a ST into a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate TL text with minimal adjustments.

11. **Modulation** consists of using a phrase that is different in the SL and TL to convey the same idea. In other words, there is a change in the point of view, focus, perspective or category of thought in relation to the SL.

12. **Particularisation** is in opposition to generalization. It refers to the procedure in which the translator uses in the TL hyponyms or more precise or concrete terms.

13. **Linguistic-paralinguistic substitution** is the translation procedure in which linguistic elements are replaced by paralinguistic elements (intonation, gestures, etc.) or vice versa.

14. **Transposition** involves changing a grammatical category or replacing one part of the speech for another, without changing the meaning of the message.

15. **Variation** is a procedure in which the translator changes elements that affect several aspects of linguistic variation: changes in tone, style, social dialect, geographical dialect.

Despite the fact that Fernandez Guerra has managed to neatly summarize the translation strategies, a thorough analysis of her classification shows that a slight intervention with respect to several of the proposed strategies could further conveniently simplify not only the classification itself but its application in actual research as well. Namely, as Fernandez Guerra herself purports there is no clear-cut boundary between adaptation, equivalence and modulation, these three

strategies could be merged and treated as one strategy under the umbrella term adaptation. Furthermore, Fernandez Guerra herself acknowledges that calques as a strategy can be considered a special type of loan or borrowing. Hence, we deem it much more convenient to treat these two as one single strategy – borrowing.

Fernandez Guerra also rightfully notes the great similarity between description and explicitation/expansion/amplification/diffusion. Because there is no clear-cut boundary in the case of these two strategies, we also propose that they should be presented as one strategy under the heading explicitation.

Finally, as far as compression/reduction/condensation/omission strategy is concerned, we deem it necessary to split it into two separate strategies, compression/reduction/condensation and omission. The argument for this decision is that translators do not treat CST in the same way when they decide to reduce or compress CST in some way, and when they decide to omit it altogether.

Hence, the condensed version of Fernandez Guerra's classification of the translation strategies comprises the following strategies: adaptation, borrowing, literal translation, explicitation, generalization, particularization, compensation, compression, omission, linguistic-paralinguistic substitution, transposition and variation.

CONCLUSION

In summary, our literature overview regarding the issue of translating culture has shown that translation theorists have rightfully recognized this issue as extremely salient and made significant efforts in deciphering it as clearly as possible. Translators need to pay special heed when they transpose linguistic material from a source language to a target language as the transference of linguistic material is closely intertwined with transferring culture as well. They need to be aware of the different types of culture specific terms as well as the host of translation strategies they can employ when dealing with these terms. Nevertheless, their starting point should always be the decision whether they would opt for the 'domesticating' or the 'foreignising' approach, which in turn will dictate the choice of the translation strategies.

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