El traductor como un mediador entre culturas. Traducción e influencias culturales

(The Translator as an Intercultural Mediator. Translation and Cultural Influences)

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Resumen: Basado en la certeza de ejemplos tomados de proverbios, modismos, realia, títulos de películas, lenguaje corporal y el argot traducidos del Inglés al polaco, el presente trabajo tiene como objetivo mostrar cómo la traducción y la cultura se entrelazan indisolublemente y para examinar y enfatizar el importante papel que desempeña el traductor para facilitar la interacción y la comprensión intercultural. La discusión ilustra claramente las trampas de traducción y enfatiza la importancia de obtener un poco de conocimiento acerca de la cultura con la que se intenta comunicar.

El estudio analizará cómo el traductor, como mediador intercultural, sistematiza y generaliza el proceso de traducción. El trabajo del traductor no consiste únicamente en encontrar palabras equivalentes en el idioma de destino. De hecho, las traducciones más precisas tendrán en cuenta muchos factores: las diferencias interculturales, sutilezas lingüísticas, la evolución del lenguaje y sus origenes, demostradas tanto por frases como por refranes, expresiones idiomáticas, nombres propios, etc. Diversas influencias culturales permanecerán intraducibles por lo que suponen un serio desafío para cualquier traductor, a veces sin darse cuenta que conducen a la incomprensión o al malentendido en el mejor de los casos, o a un insulto no intencionado en el peor.

El propósito de este trabajo es demostrar que la interacción intercultural representa un aspecto importante de la traducción, un proceso que va más allá de la transferencia del enorme significado de las palabras de un idioma a otro. El estudio de la complejidad tanto de la traducción y la comunicación intercultural requiere un enfoque interdisciplinario. De este modo, y basándose en elementos comunes compartidos y en las diferencias en el enfoque, métodos

y conceptos, tanto Los Estudios de Traducción y La Comunicación Intercultural pueden desarrollarse con éxito como disciplinas independientes.

Palabras clave: Interacción intercultural y comunicación. Traducción. Mediación.

Abstract: Based on certain selected examples of proverbs, idiomatic expressions, *realia*, movie titles, body language, and slang translated from English into Polish, this paper aims to show how translation and culture are inextricably intertwined and to examine and highlight the significant role the translator plays in facilitating intercultural interaction and understanding. The discussion will clearly illustrate translation pitfalls and emphasize the importance of gaining some knowledge about the culture one attempts to communicate with.

The study will analyse how the translator, as an intercultural mediator, systematizes and generalizes the process of translation. The translator's job does not consist solely in finding equivalent words in the target language. In fact, the most accurate translations will take into account many factors: intercultural differences, linguistic subtleties, language evolution and origin, as demonstrated by phrases such as proverbs, idiomatic expressions, proper nouns, etc. Various cultural influences will remain untranslatable and pose a serious challenge to any translator, sometimes inadvertently leading to incomprehension or misunderstanding at best or unintentional insult at worst. Therefore, the need to acquire knowledge about other cultures, their history and heritage remains crucial.

The purpose of this paper is to prove that intercultural interaction represents an important aspect of translation, a process that goes beyond transferring the sheer meaning of words from one language into another. The study of the complexity of both the translation and intercultural communication requires an interdisciplinary approach. Thus, and by building on shared commonalities and differences in the focus, methods, and concepts, both Translation Studies and Intercultural Communication Studies can successfully develop as independent disciplines.

Key words: Intercultural Interaction and Communication. Translation. Mediation.

1. The Translator as an Intercultural Mediator

Translation and culture are inextricably joined together. The translation process does not consist solely in finding equivalent words in the target language. . In fact, the most accurate translations will take into account many factors: intercultural differences, linguistic subtleties, language evolution and origin, as demonstrated by phrases such as proverbs, idiomatic expressions, proper nouns, etc. Various cultural influences will remain untranslatable and pose a serious challenge to any translator, sometimes inadvertently leading to incomprehension or misunderstanding at best or unintentional insult at worst. Therefore, the need to acquire knowledge about other cultures, their history and heritage remains crucial. A competent translator should apply sundry techniques which would help him avoid mistakes and efficiently handle intercultural dissimilarities. Research into the lexical content and syntax of the target language along with its ideologies or value systems represents just one of the many strategies applied with a view to resolving difficulties that accompany intercultural translation.

Translation, i.e. transposition of ideas expressed in one language by one social group into appropriate expressions of another group, entails a process of cultural decoding, re-coding and en-coding.
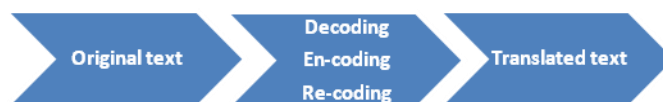

As cultures increasingly come into closer contact, multicultural considerations are brought to bear to an ever greater degree.

Hervey and Higgins suggest that it is better for the translator to use cultural translation rather than literal translation[1]. They believe that cultural transposition operates on a graded scale which begins with a level based on the source culture (exoticism) and then moves towards the level mostly based on the target culture (cultural transplantation).

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[1] Disponible en línea en: http://www.translationdirectory.com/articles/article1507.php [Fecha de consulta: 21 de mayo de 2013].
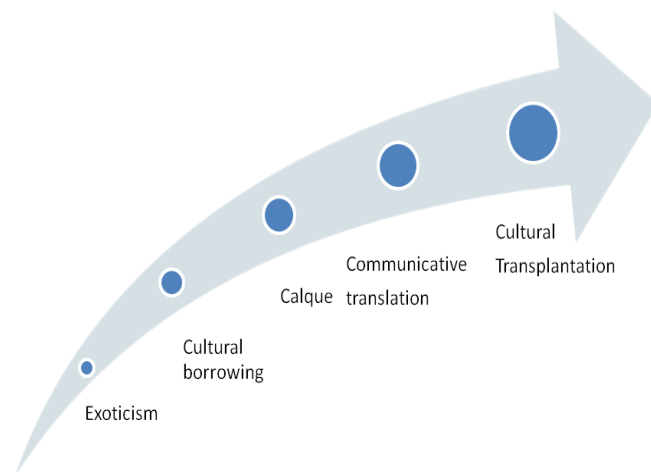
Primarily, it includes exoticisms, or literally something originating in a foreign country. "The degree of adaptation is very low here. The translation carries the cultural features and grammar of SL to TL. It is very close to transference"[2]. The next step on the scale is the so-called *calque*, which includes words from the target language but at the same time uses source language structures. As Hervey and Higgins put it: "(...) it is unidiomatic to the target reader but it is familiar to a large extent"[1.] The next level on the scale represents a cultural borrowing, a quite common cultural phenomenon nowadays. After a while, the borrowing evolves into a standard in the target language. Linguistics, for instance, uses two French words: "La langue" and "La parole" but this phenomenon has now also become popular in politics, law, history or texts covering questions of social and cultural issues. Communicative translation depends on the target language to a greater extent. It "(...) is usually adopted for culture-specific clichés, such as idioms, proverbs, fixed expression, etc. In such cases, the translator substitutes a SL word with an existing concept in the target culture. In cultural substitution, the propositional meaning is not the same but it has similar impact on the target reader. The literal translation here may sound comical. The extent to which this strategy is used depends sometimes on the license which is given to the translator by commissioners or the purpose of the

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[2] An Analysis of Culture-specific Items in the Persian Translation of "Dubliners" based on Newmark's Model.

translation"[3]. The highest point on the scale represents cultural transplantation where the translator must find equivalents with similar cultural connotations.

The translation process may be facilitated by numerous techniques proposed by linguists. Various scholars have analysed the strategies and procedures involved in translation of cultural elements, suggesting various classifications of such strategies. Newmark, one of the pioneers in this field, suggests a number of procedures for translating cultural aspects. They include naturalization, couplet, triplet, quadruplet, neutralization, descriptive and functional equivalents, footnote explanation, cultural equivalent, and compensation.[4] Naturalization means transfer of a word in its original form into the target language. Couplet, as the name suggests, involves more than one translation technique. Triplet and quadruplet represent the same issue but with reference to even more strategies. Neutralization represents yet another procedure for translating cultural aspects, sort of a paraphrase at the word level.

Then, we have a technique which splits the cultural item into two elements: descriptive and functional equivalents, where the former describes the colour, size and composition whereas the latter relates to the purpose of the source language cultural word. Explanation in the form of a footnote seems to be the most accurate solution when cultural associations, or lexemes, are difficult to copy into the target language. Such additional information usually features at the bottom of the page, at the end of a chapter or at the end of the book. You may also provide the cultural equivalent of a translated word or use a compensation technique, i.e. explain the additional meaning of the word in another part of the text.

When translating, one must not forget we are not simply dealing with written words in a certain time-space dimension but that the cultural aspect should be accounted for as a major factor. The transfer process, or re-coding across cultures, should accurately allocate corresponding attributes to the target culture to win the credibility of the target reader.

Intercultural translation challenges the translator in many ways, of which proverbs and idiomatic expressions prove most difficult to overcome. The following saying might serve as a good example: curiosity killed the cat, which in the Polish language will translate as: ciekawość to pierwszy stopień do piekła. Other problematic items include proper nouns, titles, phenomena unique to a particular culture, names of dishes, celebrations etc., distinctive world

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[3] An Analysis of Culture-specific Items in the Persian Translation of "Dubliners" Based on Newmark's Model.

[4] Based on: http://www.translationdirectory.com/articles/article1507.php [Fecha de consulta: 21 de mayo de 2013].

perceptions, signs, gestures, or abbreviations. Other aspects the translator might wrestle with include the colloquial language (e.g. dać komuś kosza- give sb the brush off) and historical references.

The process of cultural learning can be reinforced by experience, reflection, and training. Intercultural learning not only provides information but also develops skills and encourages attitudes to progress along the cultural learning curve. The Johari Window model developed by two Americans, Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingram, can be adapted to illustrate the true concept of successful cultural learning. The name was coined by combining the first names of the two researchers (Jo and Hari). The Johari Window represents a house. Room 1 shows the area we are aware of and where we share common beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviour with others. While others can, we cannot see into Room 2. We can see into Room 4 but others cannot. Room 3 is hidden from both parties. The challenge is to extend the area which we can both see into in order to increase understanding both of ourselves and of each other.
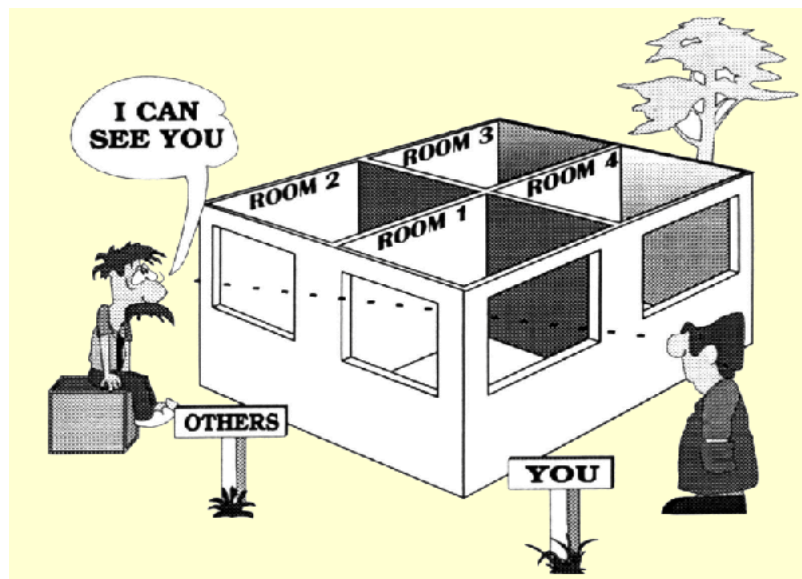
Johari Window

When translating proverbs, the translator should find equivalents in the target language. Literal word-for-word translation does not work for popular

sayings such as proverbs which often deal directly with social customs that resist transferring to other environments. In such cases, it might be helpful to look for a saying that closely resembles the intended message of the proverb. The chart below shows some examples:

il ne faut jamais dire, Fontaine, je ne boirai pas de ton eau! (dosł. Nigdy nie powinno się mówić: Fontanno nie napiję się twojej wody)	never say never	nigdy nie mów nigdy
avoir une cervelle de moineau (dosł. Mieć móżdżek wróbla)	to be bird-brained	mieć ptasi móżdżek
faire l'autruche (dosł. Robić strusia)	bury one's head in the sand	chować głowę w piasek

The next problem is slang. The job of a translator forces you to become familiar with other cultures. What you also learn a lot about is slang. How to translate a text using slang without it getting lost in the translation? How do you translate a word for which there is simply no known equivalent in the target language? Slang translation poses some of the trickiest challenges the translator can face and it has now become even more common than ever before. In some cases, the translator, usually a native speaker of the target language, may not know the meaning of the word himself and is forced to conduct some cultural research just to figure out the meaning in the source language. What is more, the translator has to decide whether to use a direct adaptation or a completely new word creation. Slang translation generally encourages the use of slang and improper language. As Michał Garcarz proposes in his article "Do Translators Avoid Slang, Swearing and Untranslatability?", certain techniques may prove helpful with slang translation: avoid certain expressions or look for an equivalent in the target language. The translator may also search and identify the closest synonym or simply describe an expression. In certain contexts, it is possible to apply word-for-word translation or create a new word in the target language, a neologism. Source texts may be enhanced by specific expressions, too. However, it should be kept

in mind that slang follows no universal rules and is forever changing so the best option would depend on the context and the type of the translation. Furthermore, Poles who have emigrated to live and work in Great Britain have created a hybrid language mixing English and Polish, the so-called Ponglish. Its origin is closely tied to the emergence of the Internet and the fact that people travel more and more. Peter Moran explains briefly how to speak Ponglish. According to him, you need to use the Polish grammar and English words, translate the English phrases word for word and use English idioms translated into Polish: for instance "Daj mi fona, jak już będziesz fri, to wezmę dzień offa i wydamy trochę keszu".

Body language represents yet another aspect of intercultural translation. When translating or interpreting gestures and facial expressions, we should always remember that they may denote different things to people in different cultures. Non-verbal communication differs immensely across cultures and that is why it is perceived so extremely relevant to learn about.

The term "realia" represents another typical cultural aspect of the translation. Realia means words and expressions used to denote culture-specific material items. Vlahov and Florin, Bulgarian translators, were the first to carry out an in-depth study of the realia and to define the contemporary sense of the word. They indicate that since realia carry very local overtones, they often pose a challenge for the translator. Realia first appeared in popular culture but now they are increasingly found in very diverse types of texts. Vlahov and Florin classify them in several different categories, which include geography, ethnography, politics, and social sciences. Certain words or expressions, typical to a culture, cannot be translated such as tsunami, harlequin or Ku Klux Klan. Creating their equivalents could be awkward. However, various strategies are used to translate the realia. They may be transcribed character by character, or so-called transliteration, when the original word is written in a different alphabet. Nevertheless, it may be sometimes better to transcribe them according to the target language pronunciation rules: for instance, the Hindi word *Kašmir* becomes *cachemire* in French; or you may create a new word or a calque, such as the English *flea market* inspired by the French *marché aux puces*. The translator also creates a new word, analogous to the original one, but which has a more local ring to it. The word *muezzin* from the Arabic *mu'adhdhi* may serve as a good example of this strategy[5]. While translating realia, it is possible to use a different but related word from the source language, passing it

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[5] Disponible en línea en: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realia_%28translation%29 [Fecha de consulta: 15 de mayo de 2013].

off as the original word. For instance, the Italian word *cappuccino* is often translated into English as *latte*, which in Italian means "milk". There is also a strategy of making the meaning explicit, such as *Jewish temple* for the *synagogue*, or replacing the word with a similar local one, such as the French *art nouveau* (literally "new art") for *Jugendstil.* To make the word more familiar or universal, the translator may replace it with one that is more generic or international, such as *red wine* for *Beaujolais* or add an adjective to help the reader identify the origin of an element of realia, as in *the Argentine pampa.* It is also possible to translate the overall meaning. For example, the English sentence *'Does the National Health Service cover this drug?'* could become, in an American context, *'How much is the co-pay for this drug?'*

Film translation represents another aspect of intercultural translation. In this area, there are certain obstacles and challenges which should be taken into consideration. The first one is the title. As far as the history of cinema is concerned, word-for-word translation does not work at all here. The Polish equivalent of "Die Hard" surprisingly is "Szklana pułapka" (literally it means "The Glass Trap" in English). In this particular case, not only the original title is important but also such factors as the plot of the movie, the director's opinion and other aspects. Moreover, the translator of the film also faces the problem of preserving the original humour. In such a situation, the translator must resort to the adaptation technique. Adaptation is a procedure applied whenever the context referred to in the original text does not exist in the culture of the target text, thereby necessitating some form of re-creation. This widely accepted definition views adaptation as a procedure employed to achieve an equivalence of situations wherever cultural mismatches are encountered. Krzysztof Hejwowski once said that we cannot expect people from different cultures to have the same reaction, because we look from different perspectives. Something familiar to our culture will be completely exotic to other cultures[6]. And the same holds true for cultural elements of the movies. For instance, it is worthwhile comparing the scene from the original version of the movie "Shrek" with the Polish dubbed version. In the original version, while being tortured by Lord Farquaad for information about the whereabouts of fairy-tale creatures, the Gingerbread Man "confesses" and starts talking about the Muffin Man. But who is the Muffin Man? We do not really know, because it is a cultural element deeply rooted in the American culture. Nevertheless, the Muffin Man is a traditional nursery rhyme or a children's song

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[6] Based on: Hejwowski Krzysztof „Kognitywno-komunikacyjna teoria przekładu".

of English origin to which the scene clearly alludes. In this case, the best way to avoid misunderstanding is to understand the entire sense and purpose of the scene and try looking for an equivalent in the target language. In the Polish version, the translator refers to the story of Żwirek and Muchomorek. The translation aims to amuse the audience and that is why the translator has to show creativity and decide what is more important: accuracy or the purpose of the translation. The reference to the Muffin Man would not make the Polish audience laugh because probably no one would understand it. By referring to a popular cartoon about two dwarfs, the Polish dubbing manages to maintain the original humour as well. Moreover, in the scene the Gingerbread Man suggests that the dwarfs are gay, a common joke topic in Poland. All in all, Żwirek and Muchomorek are much closer to our culture. In addition, translating humour in dubbed versions and subtitles varies a lot. In the subtitles, the translator chose to create a new character called Pan Bączek (Gingerbread Man: Znasz Pana Pączka?). It is clear that compared to dubbing, subtitled versions preserve fewer comical elements. In other words, dubbing is generally closer to the source text as far as the quantity and the quality of the humorous elements are concerned. Dubbed versions of comedy films might appear more amusing to the target audiences. What is more, it should be pointed out that regardless of the language or the translation method employed, the target texts tend to contain less humorous elements than the source texts. However, some people consider the Polish version to be much funnier than the English one. The success of the Polish dubbing was so great that its translator, Bartosz Wierzbięta, has become a household name. In conclusion, the problem of cultural translation has been discussed in various articles and books written by linguists and translators. The translator, as a mediator, faces a lot of obstacles and difficulties which can cause misunderstandings. What is more, solid knowledge of the realia and culture of the source language constitutes an inherent part of the cultural translation.

In the case of the English culture, the cultural knowledge should not only encompass literature, painting, history, music, television, but also children's songs and rhymes. Allusions to such nursery rhymes often appear in the press, linguistic books and even movies. Furthermore, the translator should remember that the society keeps evolving together with certain cultural aspects. Therefore, it becomes necessary to keep up-to-date with the slang or Ponglish, to obtain at least moderate knowledge of the political situation, lifestyle, popular TV shows, newspapers, magazines, and even celebrities. The list is endless. However, nobody can predict exactly what information will be required for a certain translation. Therefore, the translator should have a broad knowledge of just

about every aspect of the culture and the best strategy to regularly obtain current information about other countries is by reading, watching news, or travelling.

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