Translation as intercultural mediation
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Abstract: We first attempt to define intercultural communication by clarifying current terminology, and describing the key aspects that locate translation within Intercultural Communication. We then provide an overview of the various approaches to translation as intercultural communication. The focus is on recent developments of the interculturalists' view, which goes beyond the traditional debate over foreignization vs. domestication, in favour of a view of translation as *mediation.*

Introduction

Due to the growing importance that the role of culture has gained in translation, recently there has been wide interest in the relation between translation and Intercultural Communication. In particular, studies by Schäffner (2003) and Davies (2012) attempt to define the shared concerns between the two disciplines and in what way translation can be a medium for intercultural exchange. In this report the focus will be on studies discussing translation as intercultural mediation. Hatim and Mason (1997: 147) define 'mediation' as "the extent to which translators intervene in the transfer process, feeding their own knowledge and beliefs into their processing of a text" (cf. Kade 1968, Knapp and Knapp-Potthoff 1985, Pöchhacker 2006). However, as pointed out by Katan (1999: 420), "the beliefs we are concerned with are not those of a mediator's (ethical or ideological) position, but rather beliefs about the (communicative) needs inherent between texts and their readers". Thus, of the three approaches to cultural translation identified by Katan (2012) – 'translating *from* cultures', 'translating *for* cultures', and 'translating *between* cultures' (original emphasis), the one that is relevant to translation as intercultural communication is the third one, as it "attempts to mediate or reconcile differences" (ibid.: 1, original emphasis) by negotiating levels of tolerance.

The focus is on how values and beliefs, which "are perhaps the most difficult aspects of culture to represent and to translate" (Tymoczko 1999: 164), are conveyed across cultures, how the 'created

otherness' (Witte 1996: 76) is transmitted in translation, and how communication mediated by translation should manage cultural differences in order to ensure intercultural understanding and contribute to the development of a society which recognises and values the diversity of languages and cultures and respects identity and individuality.

Defining 'Intercultural Communication'

Intercultural communication is generally conceptualized as "communication between people from different national cultures" (Gudykunst 2002: 179). According to Samovar *et al.* (1991: 10), "intercultural communication occurs when a member of one culture produces a message for consumption by a member of another culture". Similarly, Barnett and Lee (2002: 277) define it as "involv[ing] the exchange of symbolic information between well-defined groups with significantly different cultures". A definition which helps better understand intercultural communication is that of 'intercultural situation' provided by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009: 3), i.e. a situation "in which the cultural distance between the participants is significant enough to have an effect on the interaction/communication that is noticeable to at least one of the parties".

Despite the different wordings, the various definitions share three key concepts: 1) the involvement of different cultures, 2) cultures as systems of meaning significantly different from each other, and 3) the production, transmission, and reception of a message, which poses the problem of how meanings should be constructed in order to ensure mutual understanding. Thus, intercultural communication can be defined as a type of communication in which there is a significant cultural distance between the participants, and due to this cultural distance the message needs to be mediated through meaning construction and negotiation.

Very often the terms "intercultural" and "cross-cultural" are used interchangeably, though they refer to different types of studies. Cross-cultural communication is a major area of Intercultural Communication (Inoue 2007), but while "intercultural communication" implies interaction (Fries 2006) between cultures, cross-cultural communication tends to be comparative (Gudykunst and Mody 2002, Gudykunst 2002, Fries 2006), involving "comparisons of communication across cultures" (Gudykunst 2003: 1).

Cross-cultural studies aim to investigate human behaviour in specific communicative contexts and test hypotheses about human behaviour and cultural identity. Their importance lies in the fact that they highlight significant differences in behaviour between different cultures and explain these differences in terms of cultural specificity. Wierzbicka (1996: 527) defines them as "cultural grammars", that is "a set of subconscious rules that shape a people's way of thinking, feeling, speaking, and interacting". These 'cultural grammars' cannot be considered exhaustive because of

the heterogeneity characterising cultures following globalization (Hannerz 1992); however, they can be a valuable part of the translator's theoretical background.

Two examples of cross-cultural studies that are relevant to translation are those by Hall (1959/1990) and Hofstede (2001).

The American anthropologist E. T. Hall (1959/1990) focuses on cultural differences arising "not through language but through other, 'silent', 'hidden' or 'unconscious' yet patterned factors" (Katan: 2009a). Hall compares different cultures in terms of preferred style of communication, which can be 'high context' or 'low context'. In high-context communication (HCC) "most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the text" (Hall 1976: 91). In low context communication (LCC), instead, "the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code" (ibid.).

Hofstede (2001) classifies and compares different countries according to five cultural dimensions, which are: individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity and long-term/short-term orientation. For each of these dimensions Hofstede attributes a score to over fifty countries (for extensive discussion on Hall and Hofstede see Katan, 2004).

Cultural orientations have been discussed also by others, such as Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), Inkeles and Levinson (1969), Brake *et al*. (1995), and Ting-Toomey (1999).

Translation as an act of intercultural communication

Translation theories developed rapidly after the 1970s and have raised translation from its previous status of linguistic transcoding and placed it within the wider framework of communication.
Translation has been widely acknowledged to be a communicative act (Steiner 1975, Blum-Kulka 1986, Reiss 2003, Hatim and Mason 1997, Schäffner 2003).

It has also been defined in terms of intercultural communication, with Newmark (1995: 2) suggesting that "translation mediates cultures", Snell-Hornby (1988: 26) describing translation as "a cross-cultural event", Quale (2003: 154) as "communication across cultures", Álvarez and Carmen-África Vidal (1996: 5) as "transporting one entire culture to another", and Pym (2003a: 7) as a "relatively high-effort high-cost mode of mediated cross-cultural communication".

Thus, translation can be easily defined as an act of intercultural communication, with the main issue underlying this assumption being the strict relationship between language and culture described by Gladstone (1969: 114-115):

Language and culture are inexorably intertwined. Language is at once an outcome or a result of the culture as a whole and also a vehicle by which the other facets of culture are shaped and communicated. [...] Our language reflects and reinforces our cultural patterns and value system.

If we consider that "culture is communication and communication is culture" (Hall 1959/1990: 186) and that "cultures are different in their languages, behaviour patterns, and values" (Bennet 1998, quoted in Katan 2009a: 74), then translation is clearly an act of intercultural communication, which not only involves a language transfer but also, and most importantly, implies understanding, decoding, and transmitting (through meaning construction) those 'hidden' and 'silent' cultural patterns that are "neither taught nor learned, but acquired informally" (Katan 2004: 96) and conveyed by language.

The expression 'translation as intercultural communication' is very frequently used, but as Schäffner suggests (2003: 89), the *as* is not intended to indicate identity between the two disciplines (cf. Witte 2000: 23). Instead, as suggested by Glodjović (2010), it should be intended as a *means* for intercultural communication.

However, translation does not always serve as a vehicle for cross-cultural communication (Davies 2012: 367), as language boundaries do not always correspond to cultural boundaries. On the other hand, intercultural communication does not always rely on translation (ibid.: 368), mainly because of the phenomenon of "Englishization" (Leigh 2004), that is the use of English as 'lingua franca' in interaction between members of different cultures. Thus, the translator, as well as facilitating cross-cultural communication, "may also on occasion sow confusion, promote stereotypes, or encourage misunderstanding" (ibid.: 384).

The fuzziness of cultural boundaries due to massive global movements has led to a more recent approach, which has been defined "transcultural" and draws on Malinowski's definition of "trasculturation" (in Stein 2009: 255), that is "a process in which both parts of the equation are modified". Research within this approach attempts to go beyond stereotypical "cultural differences" and investigates models and practices aimed at improving mutual understanding (for a full account see *Cultus 5*, 2012).

Theories of cultural translation

As Tymoczko suggests (2007: 224), the most systematic approach to cultural translation is that of Katan (2004). Katan draws on Hall's Iceberg Theory (1959[1990]), in which culture is represented as

an iceberg made up of three frames (technical, formal, and informal culture). For each cultural frame he discusses the extent to which a translator should intervene and the type of intervention involved. Technical culture corresponds to the visible part of the iceberg. It is scientific and analysable and can be taught by experts (Katan 2004: 45). At this level, the translator is concerned mainly with the translation of culture-bound terms.

Formal culture corresponds to the semi-visible part of the iceberg and includes all that is part of an expected way of doing things (ibid.). At this level, the translator is concerned with the *skopos* of the translation and with "tailoring the translation according to reception in the target culture" (Katan 2009a: 82) in terms of style, register, etc.

Informal culture corresponds to the invisible part of the iceberg and basically includes value orientations, defined by Brake *et al.* (1995: 34-39) as "preferences for certain outcomes over others". At this level, more complex choices are involved.

Katan (1999, 2002) exemplifies the translator's intervention at this level by adopting two concepts: 1) the notion of culture as "mental programming" (Hofstede 2001), a mental model of reality determined by one's own system of values and beliefs, and 2) the concept of 'refraction', introduced and defined by Lefevere as a "spectrum" (1982/2000: 234) thorough which writers and their work are refracted. He then proposes as example the following line from Italo Calvino's *L'avventura di una moglie/The Adventure of a Wife* (1993: 16), where the wife, Stefania, walks into a bar, goes up to the counter and makes the following request:

Un ristretto, doppio, caldissimo – disse al cameriere.

A literal, foreignizing translation, would be:

['A concentrated, double, very hot', she said to the waiter.]

As readers will evaluate both the use of language and the behaviour of the character according to their own 'mental programming' and system of values, the English foreignizing translation would imply a considerable cognitive effort and would lead readers to distort the character's behaviour, which might be perceived by the English audience as rude and impolite because of the absence of the word "please".

On the other hand, a domesticating translation in which politeness is adapted to the target audience would mean filtering the text up to a point that readers are "deprived of access to the author's real voice and cultural identity" (Davies 2012: 379). Katan (1999, 2002) proposes the following solution, in which politeness is not foreignized nor domesticated, but rather mediated:

"She asked the barman for an espresso, 'thick, double and really hot'."

The mediating strategy involves turning the direct order into an indirect request, so that the readers will be able to add politeness from their own expectancy frame (2009a: 85). This translation will

allow readers "to glimpse from the safety of their environmental bubble something of the foreignness of the Italian directness in projected requests – without distorting the illocutionary intent" (ibid.)

This is what Katan defines "mediating the point of refraction" (2002: 188): the translator is fully aware of the consequences of both domestication and foreignization (Venuti, 1995) and the strategies the translator adopts are aimed at achieving the maximum level of uptake with the minimum cognitive effort.

Similarly to Katan, Scarpa (2008) discusses Hall's triad of culture in terms of types of intervention made by the translator but in reference to specialized translation from English into Italian. While technical culture involves translating specifications (weights, measures, etc.), formal culture involves adapting the text to the norms and conventions of the target culture (style, register, power distance, etc.). Intervention at this level might also involve the deletion of sections or pictures that are not adequate for the target audience. Finally, informal culture will involve mediating value orientations. The example proposed is the title of a text introducing a collection of 17,000 poems on a CD-ROM, which reads as follows:

"Who said you can't make money with poetry?"

As Scarpa suggests, this title expresses the Anglo-American business-oriented attitude. As the Italians are very proud of their literary heritage, a literal translation would be unacceptable for the Italian audience. For this reason the Italian translator opted for the following translation:

Una biblioteca su CD-ROM [A library on a CD-ROM]

which is focused, instead, on the cultural importance of the product.

A different approach to translating culture is that by Tymoczko (2007), who argues that culture is not sufficiently problematized and that in Katan's work ideological and political implications of cultural translation are only touched upon.

Tymoczko proposes a "holistic approach to translating culture" (2007: 232), which involves not only analysing the surface aspects of culture in a text, but also considering "the entire scope of cultural underpinnings that come into play in the specific source text being translated" (2007: 234).

Her approach draws on the concept of 'habitus', which Bourdieu (1997: 82-83) defines as "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks". The starting point of the holistic assessment of cultural dimensions is the analysis of the habitus of the source culture's individuals, by which the translator will consider questions about the heterogeneity of the larger cultural system (Tymoczko 2007: 234-236). According to this approach, the elements that the translator should consider are: 'signature concepts', i.e. "cultural elements that are key to social organization, cultural practices, and dispositions constituting the habitus of a culture" (2007: 242), keywords and conceptual metaphors,

discourses (i.e. dispositions, also ideological, motivating actions and practices), cultural practices, cultural paradigms, (e.g. humour), and 'overcodings', defined as "linguistic patterns that are superimposed on the ordinary ranks of language to indicate a higher-order set of distinctions in language practices" (2007: 243).

In terms of strategies for cultural translation, Tymoczko's approach is a step prior to the selection of translation strategies, and it is meant to guide the translator in the decision-making process about how to manage and convey cultural differences (ibid.: 249-251). In other words, the holistic approach is aimed at facilitating the "translator's agency in choosing a translation strategy and in executing that strategy effectively" (ibid.: 252-253), enabling translators to give broader, deeper and more cohesive representations of the source culture (ibid.: 257), and at empowering the translator's ability to be a cultural mediator (ibid.: 254).

A concept that is central in cultural theories of translation and is particularly relevant to meaning construction is that of 'cultural filter'. This concept was first theorized by House (1977, 2009), who argues that functional equivalence is achieved by employing a cultural filter, with which the translator accommodates for differences in socio-cultural norms and differences in conventions of text production and communicative preferences and compensates for culture specificity (2009: 17).

A different approach to cultural filtering is that adopted by Katan (2004, 2009a). Drawing on concepts from Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP), reality is conceived as a map, which undergoes modelling processes involving generalization, distortion, and deletion (Bandler and Grinder 1975). According to Katan (2004) modelling processes occur through four perception filters: 'physiological', 'culture', 'individual' and 'language'. The most important filter is 'language', as we hear and learn about the world through language, which construes and distorts reality (2004: 121-123).

The translator as cultural mediator

Mediating between cultures requires specific skills, intercultural sensitivity, and responsibility. In other words, the translator needs to become a cultural mediator (cf. Baker and Chesterman 2008: 16) and must possess competencies in both cultures (Taft 1981, Katan 1999).

In Tonkin and Esposito Frank (2010) the role of the translator as cultural mediator is investigated in relation to the power of translation to shape cultural and economic identities, while Federici (2006) discusses the role of the cultural mediator within the theoretical background of post-colonial translation.

More relevant to translation as intercultural communication are the aforementioned theories by Katan (2009a) and Tymoczko (2007).

Katan (2009a) draws on the model of Logical Levels developed by Dilts (1990), which in NLP is used to understand change, and describes the cultural mediator's intervention at each level and his/her role in terms of knowledge and beliefs influencing the processing of the text.

Technical culture and formal culture correspond to the context of situation. In technical culture the mediator is concerned with behaviour (what is to be translated), while in formal culture s/he is concerned with appropriateness (how it is to be translated) and with strategies and capabilities through which the text operates in the target culture. Informal culture corresponds to the context of culture. The cultural mediator will need to investigate the values and beliefs (the motivational 'why') carried out by the ST and how these are likely to be filtered and interpreted by receivers. Finally, at the level of identity the translator will take into account the needs and requirements of the various actors involved in communication (ST author, commissioner and intended reader, the translator-mediator him/herself and his/her own values and beliefs).

Tymoczko's approach (2007) focuses instead on the cultural mediator's ideological position, which undoubtedly influences the way the mediator exercises his/her agency. More specifically, she discusses the translator's ideological agency in terms of strategic self-censorship, which occurs when "some cultural elements of a source text are given zero translation because of goal-driven decision-making procedures consciously chosen by the translator" (ibid.: 257). As context-specific cultural differences, such as those involving geopolitical power, sovereignty, autonomy, and cultural identity, are crucial, and cultural patterns of a minority source culture tend to be effaced and assimilated to dominant receptor norms, it is essential that translators assess their attitude towards self-censorship through self-reflexivity (ibid.: 258).

In the following paragraph two aspects which are relevant to the interculturalists' view of translation will be discussed: intercultural competence and intercultural training.

1. Intercultural competence

In order to enable communication between members of different cultures, translators need to acquire an intercultural competence, which Kelly (2005: 33-34) identifies as one of the seven components of translation competence.

Witte (2000: 163, translation by Schäffner 2003: 93) speaks in terms of *translatorische Kulturkompetenz* [translation-specific cultural competence], which is defined as follows:

> Translation-specific cultural competence is the ability to become aware of and check what is unconsciously known, the ability of consciously learning something which is not yet known in both one's own and the other (foreign) culture, and the ability to relate both cultures to each other, to compare them with the aim of purposeful and situation-adequate reception and

production of behaviour for the needs of at least two interacting partners from two different cultures in order to achieve communication between these interacting partners.

According to Bennet (1993), intercultural competence is developed after having gone through a number of stages towards 'intercultural sensitivity'. Bennet's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) charts the change from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativity over a period of six stages.

Following Robinson (1997: 231), who suggests that Bennet's model "might usefully be expanded to include translation and interpretation", Katan (2004: 329-340) employs the model to explain how trainee translators' intercultural sensitivity is developed over the various stages. The first three stages relate to ethnocentrism and are 'denial', 'defence' and 'minimization'; the last three stages relate to ethnorelativity and are 'acceptance', 'adaptation' and 'integration'. Only at the integration stage will the translator be able to fully understand the underlying values and beliefs that affect communication styles. It is at this stage that the translator will be able to disassociate from both ST and TT cultural frames by taking the "third perceptual position" (2002: 183), in which "relativity is valued, and mediation is the norm. [...] There is understanding of both source and target text values, norms and practices, rather than submission to one or other dominant type" (2002: 144). However, as Davies states (2012: 384), translators, interpreters and mediators in general are first of all individuals with their own preconceptions and motivations. Hence, self-reflexivity is required in order for translators to become aware of their own way of perceiving cultural difference (Tymoczko 2007: 236) and increase their responsibility. Indeed, by taking the third perceptual position the translator will set the conditions for ideal intercultural communication, where "both parties step outside their culture-bound perspectives and come together in some kind of no-man's land between the two" (Davies 2012: 380).

Boylan (2009: 33) discusses intercultural competence in terms of ability to "accommodate" and to "decentre oneself into the world of an interlocutor" (2009: 33). Drawing on Pym's (2008) categories of language-choice options available in international encounters, he identifies five major levels of accommodation and indicates, for each level, the corresponding linguistic competency and effort required. The level of accommodation that is relevant to translation as intercultural communication is level 3, which involves both linguistic and cultural change (by one of the sides) and concerns "the ability to co-construct shared meanings across cultural divides, through empathetic decentring and introjection" (Boylan 2009: 38).

Translation-specific cultural competence is an important requirement for translation as a medium for intercultural exchange. However, successful intercultural communication does not depend merely on the translator's skills:

A translator may in effect open a few doors, shed light on dark corners, make the Other's voice audible for those willing to listen it. But successful intercultural communication requires much more than just a good or even a brilliant translator: it requires two parties willing to look outside their own frameworks and move a little closer together. Ultimately the interlocutors must carry themselves across the boundaries; the best translator can only show the way. (Davies 2012: 384)

2. Intercultural training

According to Witte (1996: 74), the teaching of translation-oriented cultural competence should comprise two levels of behaviour: 1) an object-level, that is trainee translators acquire cultural competence with regard to their future role as translator, and 2) a meta-level so that they will have "a knowledge about the behaviour of others" (1996: 74). Based on the work of Thomas & Hagemann (1992) she argues that the type of training that best fits translation-oriented culture teaching is 'cultural (self-)awareness training'. The objectives of this training would be to raise awareness of cultural differences in behaviour and lead students to reflect upon their own culture's, other cultures' and their client's conditions of perception.

Katan (2009b) identifies five sub-competencies of translation-specific intercultural competence. These are then distributed within the undergraduate and postgraduate cycles of studies.

The first three-year undergraduate course should be focused on cognitive competences. Students should learn to move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativity and learn to frame 'self' in relation to 'other' (ibid.: 291). Theory should include concepts such as maps of reality and perception filters (NLP), 'cultural grammars' (Wierzbicka 1996), Newmark's componential analysis (1993), chunking principles (Katan, 2004: 199-214) and "rich points" (Agar 1994), i.e. differences based on experience. Practical activities should aim to train students first to "write *for* the intended reader" (2009b: 293, original emphasis), and then to develop a toleration for difference.

The postgraduate course should be focused on metacognitive competencies, which include mindshifting, taking the third perceptual position and acquire openness to difference. Before translating a text, students will address a series of questions which help them analyse, synthesise and evaluate the socio-cultural context of both ST and TT.

Yarosh and Muies (2011) highlight the importance of the cognitive approach in intercultural learning for translators. Students should be introduced to the concept of mental models and helped identify the mental representations underlying linguistic forms. They will then understand that the translator's aim is to create mental representations as close as possible to those characterizing a

hypothetical average reader in the source culture, and then choose a way of expressing these representation in the target language so that the target readers can create similar representations (ibid.: 42-43). The two scholars then describe three activities (for a detailed description see 2011: 46-51) held as a pilot experiment at the University of Deusto in Bilbao within a Translation and Interpreting course. As they explain, the aim of these activities was to introduce the idea of culture as knowledge, practise "bridging the cultural gap", make students aware of how misinterpretation occurs when dealing with different mental models, make them appreciate the fact that words are linked to images, ideas and beliefs, and foster student's ability to imagine how people of different culture would perceive certain world phenomena.

Conclusions

Translation can be considered an act of and a medium for intercultural communication.

So far, translation as intercultural communication has been investigated in terms of functional equivalence and foreignization vs. domestication. However, recent studies have provided a new approach focusing on translation as mediation.

The role of the cultural mediator involves mediating value orientations across cultures, negotiating levels of tolerance and enriching the reader's cognitive environment. However, when discussing translation as mediation we necessarily need to consider the role and impact of ideological constraints on the translation process.

Due to the complexity of cultural identity and the fuzziness of cultural borders, new theories, models, practices and training for increasing intercultural communication need to be investigating adopting a new, wider 'transcultural' approach.

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