The Role of Translation in Transferring Cross-Cultural Knowledge and Information

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"Each linguistic community has its own perception of the world, which differs from that other linguistic communities, implies the existence of different worlds determined by language."

Edward Sapir

Abstract

Language, being an exclusively human feature, is principally dynamic; it involves a variety of changes and adjustments in its course of existence. It is also considered as a factor that links distinct cultures and a way of expressing thoughts and feelings; accordingly, translation is one of the principal, ultimate and appropriate ways in transferring culture. Translation, including the transposition of thoughts expressed in one language by a specific social group into the adequate expression of another group. As cultures are increasingly brought into greater contact with one another, multicultural considerations are taken to an increasing degree and consequently, the process of cultural de-coding, re-coding and encoding take-place. In effect, our extensive discussion topic in language is not the rapport between translation and culture since there is an intimate relationship between translation and culture. What interests us in the present paper is not accomplishing only a particular defined ideal equivalence relation between translation and culture, but, among other things, how do some precise changes influence us when we are trying to comprehend a text before finally translating it? We are not just dealing with words in a written script in a specific period of time and space; most importantly it is the "cultural” aspect of the text that we ought to take into account. The process of transfer, i.e., re-
coding across cultures, should; consequently, allocate corresponding attributes with regard to the target culture to ensure credibility in the eyes of the target reader.

**Key-words**: translation, culture, cultural de-coding, re-coding and encoding, multicultural.

**Introduction**

Translation is not restricted to meanings and sounds, words, grammar and rhetoric; however, it goes beyond the linguistic barriers to the cultural implications. It is acknowledged that translation is widely considered as a blending of cultures and a process of decoding and encoding i.e., it decodes the meaning in the text of the source language (SL) and transmits the meaning in a coded form in the target language (TL). However, such a process requires to be obviously recognized, not merely as a mechanical transference from one linguistic register to another; nonetheless, as an encounter from two distinct languages and two different cultures.

**Translation Defined**

Formerly, translation can be defined as the act of changing something from one form to another. Semantically, Translation is the process of translating a text into a distinct language. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, translation signifies "The actual process of translating a written or spoken expression of the meaning of a word, book, speech...etc in another language". Commonly, translation is a process of rendering meaning, thoughts or messages from one language to another. Among the widespread definitions of translation the one that is introduced by Newmark (1988: 5) who identifies translation as "Rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text". One of the most noticeable definitions of translation was stated by Hatim and Munday (2004: 6) who recognize translation as "The process of transferring a written text from source language (SL) to target language) TL". Theorists from a different variety of perspectives consider translation as an art. Moreover, they add that it is also a skill. Translation is an integrated process that encompasses comprehension, analysis, and reformulation of products by combining the contextual, semantic and socio-cultural aspects of source language and target language. From these descriptions of the term ‘translation’, one may come to recognize that it is such a perplexing process that requires the involvement of some crucial formulas and basics.
Translation is widely defined as the communication of the meaning of a source-language product by means of an equivalent target language product.

**Kinds of Translation**

Translation has been defined alternatively by numerous linguists and translation theorists who may use distinct terminology to refer to specific kinds of translation; however, they appear to be the same. Consequently, they classify differently the types of translation although the basically overlapping dichotomies in binary oppositions starting with the eldest Literal vs Free, some others theorists presume ‘Literary vs non-literary or informative, semantic vs communicative, static vs dynamic, written translation and oral translation (interpretation). Translation is divided into many major types. As matter of fact, our main concern in this study is not to highlight the different types of translation, but rather how some precise changes influence translators when they are trying to comprehend a text before eventually translating it regardless of the type of translation they may use. However, it is crucial to stress one common binary opposition of translation. For instance: **Direct/Literal translation**: It is also known as ”**Word-for-word translation**“. This kind of translation is recognized as the technical translation of source texts into target ones (i.e., borrowing, calque and literal). Conversely, this type may lead the translator to mistranslating the text and it may probably imply several errors. For instance, translating literally the French sentence ”Selma va à l’école“ to English ”Selma goes to school“. In this example, the literal translation seems to be worthy; nevertheless, it may not be the case within others sentences. Study this example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French Sentences</th>
<th>Literal Translation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ce ne sont pas vos oignons</td>
<td>Those are not your onions</td>
<td>it is none of your business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caractère de chien</td>
<td>bad attitude, ill temper</td>
<td>Dog’s personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comme ça, comme ça</td>
<td>Like this, like that</td>
<td>Neither good nor bad, so so</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 In translation theory it is also termed *paraphrase*. **Phrase**
In the above three sentences, it is exhibited some of the French idioms, the literal translation and their correct meaning. The practice of literal translation could not reveal the exact meaning of the source language and consequently affect the sense which is extremely different from the intended one. **Free translation** called "meaning-based translation" (Larson, 1984) or known as "sense for sense translation" is based on communicating the meaning of the source language in the usual forms of the target language. According to Larson (1984) free translation does not emphasize the original form of the text, involving the structure and metaphor. Xi and Liu (2007), on the other hand, confirm that free translation does not depend on omission or addition of contents of the source language, but rather analyzing the source language which is a significant factor in free translation. In this respect, Tong (2007) has strongly claimed that translators have to possess extensive and comprehensive views of both the source language and the target language, in which culture has a crucial role to play and an essential value to consider on translation.

**Culture Defined**

The concept of culture has been critically debated among numerous anthropologists since it is a disreputably problematic term to delineate. Some American anthropologists such as: Apte (1994) stated that there is no contract amongst anthropologists to define culture sufficiently vis-à-vis its nature. In point of fact, the intricacy of understanding the notion of culture can be either conceptual or semantic i.e., it relies on the various usage of the word and its multiple interpretations and meanings. On the other hand, the complexity of that concept is not restricted in conceptual or semantic agendas; however, it transcends its boundaries and can principally be ideological, historical and political (Avruch: 1998). It is said that culture is the common programming of mind, beliefs and behaviors shared by a group of people and distinguishes members of one group from another (Hofstede, 1991/1994). Spencer-Oatey (2008:3 asserts“
Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour.

Culture is broadly defined as a system of learned behavior patterns which involves communications, language, religion, cuisine, social habits, relationships, manners of interacting and roles, music and arts.

Aspects of Culture

Individuals are explicitly unconscious of several norms, values and roles that arrange and structure their behavior. By the 19th century, there were three major remarks that have been achieved by virtually some researchers involved in investigating culture. At this point, it is highlighted that there are countless characteristics and variations of culture appearing in given societies. If one may throw a glance at the hundreds of societies that exist or have existed around the world, it is worth mentioning that the principal observation that caught one’s attention is that there is tremendous distinction with respect to the cultural mannerism occurred in these societies. Before going further, it is necessary to point out that the cultural diversity can be found within any society; however, there are some cultural universals as well that may unify all societies. Yet, they seem to be very few. Furthermore, some elements of particular culture are linked and interrelated. Culture is fundamentally manifested at dissimilar tiers among which these ones: observable artifacts, values and basic underlying assumptions (Schein, 1990).

Language and Culture

Language involves various social systems that may reflect several meanings. Traditionally speaking, it is regarded as a code i.e., it is a collection of words and series of norms and rules that construct sentences. In this view, the concept of language is; however, very limited and
narrow since language is predominantly used in order to communicate, negotiate, and reconceptualise some thoughts; moreover, articulate and manage our individual identities or interpersonal relationship. The understanding of language as being merely fixed and finite doesn’t investigate the complexities occurred in language.

Language in its nature is energetic and dynamic. It includes the rich complexities of communication. Broadly speaking, language is seen as an intricate body of knowledge to be mastered, it is defined as a social practice (Kramsh, 1993) and if language is a social practice, then it is worth developing the consciousness of the nature of language with regard to culture and its influence on the whole world. There is an intimate relationship between language and culture as far as meaning is concerned. In real language use, meaning is not only conveyed or translated through language form, but it is the cultural context that coins and interprets meaning, this means that language is not just a way to define language; nonetheless, it also reveals culture; therefore, culture in its broader concept is innately joined to many linguistic concepts.

**Cultural Translation and Cross-Cultural Knowledge**

The twentieth century witnessed the enlargement of some predominant topics such as the correlation between translation, language and culture. There was a fascinated view of the relationship between the last concepts expressed by Jiang (2000) who argues that the relationship between language and culture seems as flesh and blood. He asserts that language would be dead without culture, and culture would have no appearance without language. The main purpose beyond translation is to progress comprehension among various and distinct countries and nations. Eugene Nida, one of the American translation theorists, considers translation as a process that involves reproducing the receptor language the nearest natural equivalent of the source language, in respect of both meaning and form. Nevertheless, the reproduction of the closest natural equivalent in the target language is adhered to the cultural differences which influence the translation or the interpretation of any text. These differences may cover histories, geographic locations, local customs and religious beliefs….etc. It isn’t uncommon that there are a large number of obstacles that impede people from understanding each other appropriately. Consequently, translation does not require only the linguistic competence of an interpreter or
translator, but among other things, it involves the acquaintance with the respective cultures i.e., it is essentially based on the transfer between cultures. So, the primary aim of any translator or interpreter should be the realization of a cultural equivalence between source language and target language and making the semantic zero via culture.

Cultural translation deals mainly with cultural differences. The central issue that cultural translation must solve in translating texts is the cultural differences of those texts, taking into account the source culture. Cultural translation derived from cultural anthropology. It tackles translation through cultural differences as well as cultural contexts. Translators of cultures have to analyze the issues between source language and the target language and they must seek for equivalence between cultural source and the target culture. A cultural translator is required to have a much more widespread knowledge than the text actually provides.

**Conclusion**

Translation as being the transfer of culture, has obviously contributed to raising an awareness of the importance of cultural knowledge; thus, a translator should not be a mere translator or interpreter, but rather ‘intercultural mediat’or. So translation, in its nature, is more than a linguistic activity, it is an intercultural activity. Ultimately, it can be pointed out that transcoding process should be focused not merely on linguistic translation but also on cultural transposition. As a result, a translator must be both bilingual and bicultural.

**References**


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