

# Translation – Business Communication and Cultural Negotiation

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## Abstract:

*Nowadays, the words ‘culture’ and ‘translation’ are being increasingly linked. The cultural horizon has become a general requirement for a translator involved in the translating process. This is a problem of great complexity if we consider that the negotiators of international economic affairs act in different cultural environments. Although some advance the idea that ‘specialized translations’ do not imply dealing with cultural words, collocations, phrases etc., we consider that any people has its own culture-specific language.*

**Keywords:** cultural mediator, business negotiator, culture, mediation, equivalence.

The idea is shared that the ability to speak a foreign language involves the ability to translate into that particular language. The word ‘translation’ may refer to:

- both the translating process and its product
- the product of the process of translation (the translated text)
- the process, the activity performed by the translator

It is an established fact that translation as a profession has become a cost-led industry though it should not be viewed as such. Nowadays there are numberless companies dedicated to the provision of the translation services. Generally, such companies have their own staff translators that have been assessed and tested to ensure that they have appropriate skills for this purpose. In this respect, the term ‘specialised translation’ implies that the translator will need to have an adequate knowledge of a particular discipline (economy in our case). Some use the term ‘specialised’, others use terms such as ‘technical’. Unlike the translation of literature, which involves comprehending the peoples and cultures coming into contact, ‘specialised translation’ implies knowing and understanding the appropriate terminology of both the ST and the TT. In both the situations, dictionaries are serviceable but they do not totally reliant.

Seen in another light, translation is a craft and a science that implies a creative process. If one regards translation as an art, things begin to change because creation implies both an effort and a struggle to find the right words.

As regards the (un)translatability of a text, there are different opinions on this subject matter. Translators put forward two extreme views: either everything can be translated without loss or that nothing can be translated without loss, as in the Italian expression *traduttore/traditore*/'translator/traitor.

In Peter Newmark’s view (1995: 6), “everything without exception is translatable; the translator cannot afford the luxury of saying that something cannot be translated”. Following Newmark’s principle, the translator will understand that every problem has a solution. Moreover, Newmark (1995: 6) emphasizes that “translation has its own excitement, its own interest. A satisfactory translation is always possible, but a good translator is never satisfied with it. It can usually be improved [...]. A translator is always trying to extend his knowledge and improve his means of expression”.

## 1. Translating Business across Cultures

It is an established fact that conceptual terms are becoming easier to translate. For instance, translating new technology across cultures will certainly not create problem. At the technical level, communication is explicit, and ideas are consciously conveyed. It is the dictionary denotative meaning that needs to be translated. This form of culture is indeed now global, with business and industry working to the same standards throughout the world.

At the technical level, negotiation of meaning is reduced to the minimum. In this respect, Peter Newmark (1988: 6) states that: “No language, no culture is so ‘primitive’ that it cannot embrace the terms of, say, computer technology”. Thus, at the technical level little or no loss of meaning may occur due to the fact that communication at this level has no extra-linguistic context. That is to say, the text is the authority, and the message is clearly conveyed. Anthony Pym (2000: 189) calls translation at this level NANS or rather “no-addition-no-subtraction”. It is also at this level that the business community is most aware. A translator without the technical language skills will clearly not be effective. In these cases, a successful translator will not only need to have a native command of both languages but will also need to know where to find technical information efficiently: from dictionaries, encyclopaedias, glossaries, thesauruses, on paper or on the Internet. The Internet has become a useful tool in providing on-line translation assistance in a variety of forms.

The fact should be mentioned that understanding the meaning of the ST is crucial in the translating process. Federica Scarpa’s (qtd. in Katan 2004: 82) surveys on specialized translation treats topics of polysemy, (partial) synonymy and concludes with the following warning: “There is then, the constant danger that a translator will confuse the specialized use of a word with the more common”. It is generally known that software programs make these translations as good as the native human translator-and require only minimum post editing.

Technical concepts, such as satellite communications technology, have to be discussed, negotiated and implemented by people working within their contexts of culture. People, as representatives of their culture, do things in different ways, and usually out-of-awareness. Newmark (1988: 156), in fact, cautions about “the possible cultural and professional differences between your readership and the original one”, and explains that these will need to be taken into account when approaching a technical text.

## **2. The Translator as a Cultural Mediator and Business Negotiator**

The words ‘culture’ and ‘translation’ are being increasingly linked. As mentioned above, the cultural horizon is a general requirement for a translator involved in the translating process. This is a problem of great complexity if we consider that the negotiators of international economic affairs act in different cultural environments.

Translation is the exploration of a gap between cultures. The translator will mediate between two LC<sub>s</sub> in converting LC<sub>1</sub> into LC<sub>2</sub>. The translator’s cultural competence and knowledge is very important as s/he does not simply search for an “equivalent”. His/her intention is to express the same reality and mode of expression through LC<sub>2</sub>. Although some advance the idea that ‘specialized translations’ do not imply dealing with cultural words, phrase or collocations, we consider that any people has its own culture-specific terminology which put into light the locality of the specialized language. We realize that there is a universal CL but the competent translator must seek and find the ways of expression of each culture coming into contact and even come up with new coinages.

The concept of cultural mediator was introduced by George Steiner (qtd. in Katan 2004:16) who believed that “the translator is a bilingual mediating agent between monolingual communication participants in two different language communities”. The translator is also a negotiator, that is to say, he has to make choices according to the situation of translation.

By way of illustration, in the table bellow, the focus is on effective communication and understanding between the service provider and client while respecting the client’s cultural and language needs (see TABLE 1). In the translating process, quality gaps may arise unless there is clear specification of the customer’s needs.

Table 1

### Quality Gaps

NO.	QUALITY GAP	HOW THE QUALITY GAP ARISES
1.	The gap between what the customer expects and the PM's understanding of what the customer wants	The gap arises when the PM does not understand what the customer considers to be important to the translation process. The customer may expect a perfectly-formatted, independently-checked and edited translation (although has not specifically stated so) whereas the project manager believes that the translation will be used for information purposes only and requires no special layout.
2.	The gap between the PM's perception of what the customer wants and the actual specification for the translation	The gap arises when the PM does not draw up a specification that is detailed enough to show clearly what is required. This may leave the translator who actually carries out the translation unsure about what exactly is intended. The gap may be a consequence of the translation requirements not being stated adequately by the customer. For example, the customer may expect the translation to be provided in a particular software format whereas the translator is not informed of this.
3.	The gap between the customer specification and how the customer views what is delivered	The gap arises when the delivered translation does not correspond to what was specified by the customer. One example is the translation being longer than expected. It is the customer's perception that is important but there may be a number of intangible factors that were not anticipated.
4.	The gap between the customer's experience and external communication to the customer	This arises when the translation provider cannot deliver what is promised in advertising or promotion material. In other words, the translation provider must make sure that what is promised is, in fact, delivered.
5.	The gap between the customer's expectation and the customer's experience	A customer's expectation is affected by his own experiences, the recommendations of others and the claims made by the TSP. The TSP must bear in mind that the customer's experience is determined by his perception of what is supplied, not by the perception held by the TSP.

Source: qtd. in Samuelsson – Brown 2006: 50-1

In the discussion about the provision of translating services to the customer it is best to assume that the latter has little knowledge about the requirements. The customer should not be treated in a patronizing manner but be offered advice and guidance. The customer may be informed about translation needs with a degree of diplomacy. As a rule, the majority of customers are informed but a customer education is always needed.

It is an established fact that translation has become a cost-led business. A number of situations may occur regarding the service provider-customer relationship.

One of these problems may be that the customer has little knowledge about what is involved in the provision of the end product. The situations in which a customer may verify the quality of a translation are rare. What the customer should be informed about is that the least expensive translation is not likely to be the best quality translation.

The customer-service provider relationship should be based on communication and translation needs should be an integral part of it. Nonetheless, the customers are exposed to

some risks. They are in danger of accepting lower prices from less qualified translators. This situation may result in the fact that the customers may not use the product appropriately which leads them to additional costs.

There are, however, typical misconceptions regarding the customers' expectations:

- The translator can work in numberless languages
- The translator is able to tackle all subjects
- The translator is available at any time
- Checking the translation takes no time
- The translator may accept any reward
- The translator can produce a perfect translation

If translators do not include culture as part of the translating process, they will be classified as mere transcribers, copiers, stuffers and sealers. As Ronald Taft (1981: 53) puts it:

***A cultural mediator is a person who facilitates communication, understanding, and action between persons or groups who differ with respect to language and culture. The role of the mediator is performed by interpreting the expressions, intentions, perceptions, and expectations of each cultural group to the other, that is, by establishing and balancing the communication between them. In order to serve as a link in this sense, the mediator must be able to participate to some extent in both cultures. Thus a mediator must be to a certain extent bicultural.***

In the chapter entitled *The Translator as Mediator*, Basil Hatim and Ian Mason (1990: 128, 223-24) discuss the following:

*The translator is first and foremost a mediator between two parties for whom mutual communication might otherwise be problematic and this is true of the translator of patents, contracts, verse or fiction just as much as it is of the simultaneous interpreter, who can be seen to be mediating in a very direct way.*

According to the authors, there are two specific ways in which a translator is a mediator:

- ◆ bi-cultural vision

Hatim and Mason consider that the translator's role is to identify and resolve the discrepancy between sign and value across cultures.

- ◆ critical reader

They also argue that the translator is a 'privileged reader' of the SLT. In other words, s/he will have the opportunity to read the text carefully before translating.

Mary Snell-Hornby (qtd. in Katan 2004: 21) describes the translator as a cross-cultural specialist. She assumes that the translation process can no longer be regarded as being between two languages but between two cultures implying 'cross-cultural transfer'.

Lance Hewson and Jacky Martin (1991: 133-155) view the "Translation Operator as a Cultural Operator. Their aim is to "underline once again the [Translator Operator's] social-cultural identity as being one of the many factors which account for translation being what it is".

Hatim and Mason (1990: 11) sustain the same idea: "inevitably we feed our own beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and so on into our processing of texts, so that any translation will, to some extent, reflect the translator's own mental and cultural outlook, despite the best of impartial intentions".

With regard to the competencies a mediator must possess in both cultures, Ronald Taft (1981: 73) mentions the following:

- Knowledge about society: history, traditions, customs;
- Communication Skills: written, spoken, non-verbal.
- Technical skills: the skills required by the mediator's status, e.g. computer literacy

➤ Social skills: knowledge of rules that govern social relations in society and emotional competence, e.g. the appropriate level of self-control

The most important factors of translation are intention, meaning, tone, the impact, the texture and function of the translated text (in our case the play translated to be read or to be acted), the text as a unit. We share Peter Newmark's opinion that “there is continuous tension between the maximal unit - the text and the minimal unit - the word”. The translator has to make his or her own choices as to which meaning(s) he has to transfer depending on what he/she considers to be the writer's intentions.

The fact must be mentioned that the perfect translation is a chimera. The notion of perfect translation presupposes that both the ST and the TT are comparable in all respects. Moreover, it is presumed that both the source and the target cultures have identical cultural and economic systems. Since languages are not stable, one expression will not always mean the same. Therefore, the notion of perfect translation is tackled by people who do not know anything about translation.

As Dollerup (2006: 57) puts it, “translators are not perfect [...]. However, in the real world, the sending side involves not only an individual author, but frequently also a client who also has some reasons for having a translation done”.

Therefore, the translator's cultural competence and knowledge is very important because s/he does not simply search for an ‘equivalent’. In other words, the translator's competence is proved by his/her ability to analyse, compare and convert two cultural systems, at the same time respecting both the conflicting forces within one LC , and the interplay of these forces as the language cultures are brought into contact.

Lack of knowledge in a particular domain (e.g. translating business contracts) will affect the translator's competence. Basically, the text is situated in the middle and represents the centre, the main preoccupation of all factors involved. What a translator should do is to establish a balance between all of them or to make them equivalent. Mention should be made that equivalence in translation and absolute synonymy may never be achieved not even among words belonging to the same language, not to speak of those belonging to different languages.

To conclude, the mediator has to be flexible in switching his cultural orientation. Hence, a cultural mediator will have developed a high degree of intercultural sensitivity, and will have reached the level of ‘contextual evaluation’.

#### **Abbreviations:**

CL – Computer Language

CO – Cultural Operator

IT – Information Technology

LC – Language Culture

PM – Project Manager

QTD – Quoted

SL – Source Language

SLT – Source Language Text

ST – Source Text

TL – Target Language

TO – Translator Operator

TT – Target Text

TSP – Translation Services Provider

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