

THE IMPORTANCE OF IN-DEPTH KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE IN TRANSLATIONS

Georgiana Mîndreci¹

Abstract

The translator's role becomes paramount in the translation process since he/she becomes the second author of the book. The translator's work is double when compared to the writer's, he/she has to thoroughly analyze every word, every detail, to understand the text as a whole and then in detail in order to be able to render it in the target language (TL) as close to the original as possible. All the meanings (more or less hidden), themes and symbols of the novel arise from the author's use and choice of the language, which is very important to him/her. That is why the task of translating the distinctive idiom of a novel is not an easy one for the translators—some of them even having problems and thus having little success in arriving at literary equivalents. Therefore, there are some difficulties while translating and it is very important to manage to overcome them through different translation techniques and especially knowledge. Consequently, one of the paramount conditions for translating fiction is, for example, the flawless mastering of the language, of the culture, of the history of a people, as well as of the customs and traditions described in the original, otherwise the translator risks distorting the features of the character, of the national specificity of the writer's inspired creation. Consequently, one of the most important achievements of an appropriate translation is the excellent knowledge of the two languages and cultures.

Keywords: *Translation errors, misinterpretation, knowledge, theory, translator's role.*

JEL Classification: K0

Introduction

English is nowadays, undoubtedly, a global language in terms of communication, whether written or spoken, and has thus been increasingly used in all translation processes. Nevertheless, the translation process begins by determining the genre of the literary work, as the choice of the vocabulary greatly depends on it to render the different nuances of the words. Thus, one of the paramount conditions for translating fiction is, for example, the flawless mastering of the language, of the culture, of the history of a people, as well as of the customs and traditions described in the original, otherwise the translator risks distorting the features of the character, of the national specificity of the writer's inspired creation. Consequently, one of the most important achievements of an appropriate translation is the excellent knowledge of the two languages and cultures.

The translator must always be very careful when choosing the equivalents. Two words may be equivalent in a bilingual dictionary, but they can always be used as equivalents in a translation and it is then when the translator must find a contextual equivalent. That is why a random, hasty, analysis-free or cultural/political-confined choice of equivalents for different elements of the original from a bilingual dictionary leads to serious mistakes and misinterpretations of the meaning. The greatest difficulties in the choice and rendering of words from a source language/text into a target language/text, and implicitly of ideas and images, besides polysemy, homonymy, synonymy, are those referring to context and culture-related meanings. To all these one must add the huge trap of computer-assisted systems of translation and the limitations that come along, especially when the translator is not a professional and cannot therefore perceive the limitations that could occur.

Theoretical Background

The issue of translation is one of the oldest in the history and theory of languages. Emerging from an immediate practical necessity, the activity of translating had at first an oral character, called "interpretation," and then it was extended to written texts. In fact, not until

¹ PhD Lecturer, Constantin Brâncoveanu University, Pitesti, g_mindreci@yahoo.com

recently did the issue of translation create discussions since it was believed that a language, and especially its lexicon, is a simple inventory of words that have appropriate corresponding terms in other languages.

Closely connected to the above-mentioned issue of translation is the aspect referring to the distinction between translators and interpreters. A very clear difference between the two can only be made by making reference to the very distinctive tasks of each of them. It is usually known and accepted that a translator converts meaning from one language to another and that the translator is the one who translates in writing and the interpreter is the one who does the same things orally. But few people know which the real differences between them are, how they are trained, and what skills they are trained to develop in general. It is also true that time has also developed misconceptions concerning the translation profession. There is a wide tendency in thinking that if someone is able to speak and write a foreign language, they can become translators and if there is a dictionary, the translation is almost finished. But it is obvious that translation implies much more than translating words from a language with words from another language. It implies linguistic, cultural, and specialized knowledge.

Thus, one can say that a translator is a combination of a writer and a linguist, a person who takes written material such as newspaper or magazine articles, books, manuals or documents in one language and converts them into the equivalent in another language. In other words a translator knows two languages fluently, and often knows a third or even a fourth one. Translators must also have strong reading and writing skills, as well as a deep knowledge of the subject material they are working on. Translators typically work into their native language, that is to say that they translate material that is in their second, acquired language into the language they were born into. This situation is, quite frequently, the cause of mistakes, misunderstandings or losses in translations—as we have already seen and as we shall see further on. There are exceptions, especially among people who are born and raised bilingually, but in general translators produce their best work when going into their mother tongue. In the profession of translation, the translator's native language is referred to as the "Source Language" (SL) or the "A language," and the non-native languages as the "Target Language" (TL) or "B language" or "C language." AB language is one which the translator can speak, read, and write virtually as a native speaker does. AC language is one which the translator can read and understand almost like a native, but does not necessarily speak or write it as well as a native.

It is clear that a good translator is by definition bilingual. The opposite is not necessarily true, however. A born bilingual will still need two things to become a translator: first, the skills and experience necessary for translation; second, knowledge of the field in which he will translate. The skills and the experience for translation include the ability to write well in the language the translator is working into, the TL, and the ability to read and understand the language being translated, the SL. Further, the bilingual who would be a translator must be able to work with the most developed translation means for the period in which he or she translates. This idea adapted to nowadays involves working with the latest word processing software, machine-assisted translation tools, and typically Internet and email applications. This idea can be further developed and investigated, concerning the relationship between translators and modern translation means, but it is not the focus of our research paper.

Translators, regardless the time, environment, cultural background of their activity, must be language professionals, and they also have to cultivate knowledge of the areas they work in. Few translators claim to be able to translate anything written in their languages, which would imply that they are experts on everything. A translator who says that he or she can translate anything presents no credibility for anyone, as he/she claims to be capable of translating in every field, but in fact he/she does not master any. It goes without saying in this case that the work of such a translator is far from satisfactory and it can even cause damages,

judging from different points of view. Each field in a language is different and has its own specificity which makes it unique, different and difficult to translate and that is why a translator must work hard to develop the knowledge necessary to deal with each specific type of material.

The above-mentioned aspects lead to the idea that the translator's knowledge also includes two other important factors: first, the translator should have some background knowledge, experience and education in the respective translation's field, which can of course be acquired through self-documentation or self-study, coursework, on-the-job experience, etc. according to each specific translation context and situation; and second, the translator should have the necessary resources to deal with the material. This means dictionaries, glossaries, and any other terminology, language, or subject matter resources. Nowadays the access to such resources is almost unlimited and that is another reason why translators have to work tirelessly to improve their knowledge of the fields they work in by reading related material. Thus, being a translator represents a continuous process, a very lengthy process, not a state.

Translators are considered language professionals. They are linguists, even experts in intercultural communication and diplomats. If we try to explain all these appreciations we could say that: first, translators as linguists are capable of analyzing the syntax and structures of their languages, researching terminology, and dealing with all new developments in their languages; and second, translators as intercultural communication experts and diplomats have to be sensitive to the cultural and social differences which exist in their languages and be capable of addressing these issues when translating. These are just a few characteristics of a good translator. They are also competent writers and good socio-analysts, or at least this is what good and genuine translators are. This leads to the idea that the above-mentioned characteristics outline the ideal translator, but, unfortunately, not all translators have all these qualities, and they do not need all of them.

A very brief reference can be made to the difference between a translator and an interpreter. In common or popular acceptance, there is no difference between the two; translator and interpreter is one and the same person. But, besides the fact that translation and interpretation share the common goal of taking information that is available in one language and converting it to another, they are in fact two separate processes. A very brief and simple outline between the two refers first to the fact that translation is written and thus it involves taking a written text from a SL and translating it into a TL; and second, interpretation is oral and thus it refers to listening to somebody or something spoken and interpreting it orally into the target language. These two distinct processes differ mainly in their presentation, duration and the subject matter. In other words while interpretation involves instantaneous verbal transformation of communication on general subjects, translation involves a delayed transformation of written communication on subjects including highly specialized ones. Thus, we can easily say that translators are usually excellent writer, while interpreters have superior oral communication skills. In addition, spoken language is quite different from written language, which adds a further dimension to the distinction. We can also think about the common acceptance of the meaning of the two verbs "to translate" and "to interpret," the former refers to transposing something from a SL into a TL, and the latter refers to the interpretation of a text, which sometimes means even including our own words in order to find the best way to express the main idea.

There is a distinction between translating, which is the transferring from one language to another of ideas that are expressed in writing and interpreting which is the transferring of ideas orally expressed. Translation and interpretation require the ability to accurately express information in the TL. Word for word translation is neither accurate nor desirable and a good translator/interpreter knows how to express the source text or speech so that it sounds natural

in the TL. The best translation is one that you do not realize is a translation, because it sounds just like it had been written in the TL.

As types of interpretation we can distinguish between consecutive and simultaneous interpretation but a further analysis of the two types is not the object of the present research paper. One could say that, on the surface, the difference between interpreting and translating is only the difference in the medium: the interpreter translates orally, while the translator interprets a written text. But the practice of each profession differs in the same way that written language differs from spoken language. Thus, both translation and interpretation involve careful analysis of meaning in context and attention to extra-linguistic aspects of communication. But, in spite of the differences mentioned so far and even those not mentioned yet, there is one thing that both translators and interpreters must share, besides their deep knowledge of both languages they must understand the subject matter of the text or speech they are translating. Thus, a good translator must demonstrate general erudition and intimate familiarity with both cultures of the SL and of the TL. Translation is not just a matter of substituting words in one language for words in another, as we have mentioned before. It is a matter of understanding the thought expressed in one language and then explaining it using the resources of another language. In other words, a translator changes words into meaning, and then changes meaning back into words of a different language. So translating is basically paraphrasing. And if the translator does not fully understand one thought, then he cannot translate or interpret anything. Another important idea is that of being aware of the matter that is being discussed and that of decoding the meaning of the source text and re-encoding this meaning in the TL.

In conclusion, both the translator and the interpreter have common and different abilities: different abilities because they are trained in different matters, in order to develop those particular skills required by their professions; common abilities because they are all linguistic professionals, experts in intercultural communication.

The Translation Process as a Human Activity

The 20th century has often been called the century of speed, the century of cinema, the century of electronic computers, but also the century of translation. The translation activity has old traditions and it is generated by the worldwide existence of foreign languages and it will continue to be necessary as long as humankind does not have a single language for communication. Emerging from an immediate practical necessity, the activity of translating had at first an oral character, called “interpretation,” and then it was extended to written texts. The practice of translation depended on the chosen text. Thus the translation of a religious text, which was considered sacred, did not allow adding or omitting anything from the original text, which was believed to have divine origins. The translation of a secular text was rather an imitation or adaptation, which sometimes even changed the characters and the subject. The aim of such a translation was, first of all, an aesthetic one.

The combination of the two attitudes towards the original text led to the creation of the characteristics of modern literary translation, which took from the religious translation its respect and scrupulosity towards the original, and from the imitation and adaptation translation it preserved the concern for the aesthetic aspect of the translation. Regarding the possibility of translation, there were two opinions that have challenged each other up to nowadays:

1. On the one hand, the naïve point of view concerning the identity of idioms led to the theory that anything can be entirely translated. This point of view has had a wider spread in particular up to the Renaissance period, and it is justified by the state of development of the linguistic knowledge and discoveries.

2. On the other hand, the development of the translation activity from the Renaissance period, with its interest on antiquity, and especially the new requirements called to the attention of the translation process by the awakening of the national consciousness emphasize the difficulties of translation. The tendency to keep the local color or atmosphere and the need to transpose the reader in another country and in another era or epoch, stressing at the same time the originality of the translated work, make the translator face new problems, which can prove sometimes very difficult to solve. On the theoretical level the consciousness of these difficulties led to the idea that a complete translation is never possible.

A translation is usually associated with the transposition of literary works from one language into another, that is why connected with the translation of artistic literature there have made many relevant considerations, but also even more speculations, both by literates and by linguists. Nevertheless, the decisive question still persists: what is a translation in the end? Is it science or art? Regarding the artistic texts we might say that a translation is an art based on science and the interpretations made by linguists were often the base of the translators' concrete experiments. Not even the definition of translation can be given very easily. In a broad sense, it can be considered as the process of transformation of a message delivered in a language, into the same message, but made in another language, provided that all (or rather all) qualities of the initial message are kept.

In fact, not until recently did the problem of translation create discussions, as it was believed that a language, especially its lexicon, is a simple inventory of words that have appropriate corresponding terms in other languages. In fact, every language has its own individual way of reflecting the reality and its own way of organizing the data of the experience. Languages divide into segments the outer reality in a different way and characterize it in different ways and, as a result, two pictures of the objective world, presented by two random languages, usually do not coincide.

In a simplistic acceptance it is believed that a translation is to find for the words of a language the equivalent words in another language. Considering that the lexemes are a kind of "labels or tags" of objects, phenomena, qualities, actions, etc., one can very easily get the wrong idea that the translation would be a simple exchange of "labels or tags." But a language, reduced to its essential principle, is not just a list or a bag of words or simply adding new labels or tags to already familiar objects, it is much more than that: getting used to analyzing this way the object of the linguistic communication. The idea according to which each language has its own way of analyzing the specific facts of the surrounding world presents a serious theoretical objection against the possibility of making a translation.

If we admit that languages differ one from another not only by their external aspect—by an individual vocabulary and through a specific grammatical structure—but also by how they organize the semantic content of the lexicon, people who speak different languages not present things in the same way. By comparing the lexical items of two languages, one can find only a partial coincidence between them: the semantic entities of the words in two languages coincide only in part. These factors hinder very much the process of translation. A translation, which is a creative process, must be distinguished from the translation theory, which is a special scientific discipline. The purpose of the translation theory is to follow the regularities which are at the base of a translation from one language into another, to establish the correlation between the original and the translation, to make some generalizations, based on some particular cases, which could then be used in the translation process. The help given by the translation theory to the practice of translation is the emphasis on the different possibilities of a language, in the choice, from a sea of varied means, of the most appropriate one for a context.

The translation process begins by determining the genre of the literary work, as the choice of the vocabulary greatly depends on it to render the different nuances of the words.

Thus, one of the paramount conditions for translating fiction is, for example, the flawless mastering of the language, of the culture, of the history of a people, as well as of the customs and traditions described in the original, otherwise the translator risks distorting the features of the character, of the national specificity of the writer's inspired creation. Consequently, one of the most important achievements of an appropriate translation is the excellent knowledge of the two languages and cultures.

Another extremely important condition is that the translation be adequate, to render truthfully the idea and content of the literary work, to keep the artistic expression with all its information. It is obvious that the knowledge of the language, the intuition, the sense of the language, entering the world of the images from the original have a great importance in the translation of literary works. Therefore, one of the most important conditions for achieving a loyal, accurate and appropriate translation is the exactitude. The criterion of exactitude or faithfulness is relative and it may vary depending on the style, the genre of a certain work. A translator should avoid both the distortion of the original text, the introduction into a text of foreign unsuitable items, and the mechanical literal translation.

Most research in the translation field are specifically linked to the study of the typical relationships between the original text and the text of the translation—it is something natural, since such research follow certain practical purposes: by comparing a large number of translated texts with their original to find the respective corresponding terms which appear regularly as equivalents of the linguistic elements of the original or source language.

The immeasurable nature of the lexicon of two languages and the divergence of the capacities of combining the words in different languages, raises another problem, namely if an appropriate translation in general is possible; in other words, if by using the linguistic sources of a language, one can exactly render a text from one language into another one, keeping the exact form and content of the original. Since the exact rendering of the specificity of the original's content and form is mostly complicated because every language has its own individual way of reflecting the surrounding reality, organizing in its own specific way the data of the experience, it is often said that proper translation is generally impossible.

A translator faces great difficulties when trying to translate an ancient monument into a language without old literary traditions. Great difficulties are also met when translating some words that designate "realia" belonging to the civilization and culture specific to a linguistic collectivity, plants and animals, known only by them, which represent the specificity of that particular area. For example, it is impossible to translate puns or play on words; they can only be imitated or commented in another language.

Thus, we can say that a text will always be translated with a slight deviation from the original, but nothing is untranslatable. In any translation, inevitably there is loss, especially in terms of form. Regarding the adequacy of a translation, one may not accept a translation performed under the standards. Of course there may be some objective factors when because of the lack of a rich written literature in the respective language, some awkwardness in translation will be inherent, as well as forced constructions, determined by the imitation of the structures of the original language, or by the lack of adequate means to render them.

But cases of mistranslation, errors, vagueness and inaccuracy caused by poor knowledge of the language are totally inadmissible. In part, it is about the failure to conform to the specificity of the target language by imitating the structures of the source language; the structure, which stylistically is the closest to the original play and seems to fully render its essence, is not always chosen. There are many cases in which the translators do not take into account the specificity of the translated work, using as equivalents for the translation words that belong to another stylistic level than the one used by the original, which breaks the overall image and atmosphere of the literary work, and leads to losing the peculiarities of the original. Many errors of this type are usually made by translators without experience, by

translators who have poor knowledge of the respective target language and who, by using the dictionary, randomly choose the first equivalent for a certain word from the source language. Thus, one should keep in mind the fact that, especially when it comes to an artistic work, nobody needs to replace a word with its synonym in the author's text; although in principle it could be possible to do that. Only the respective author also had the opportunity to use the word, which someone would like to recommend, but the author the one in the text, considering it more appropriate for the respective situation. Therefore, the translator also has the task of finding the appropriate equivalent for the word required. Thus, one of the basic problems in a translation, which presents special difficulties, is the choice of the words.

Conclusions

The crucial role played by both written and spoken translations in inter-human communication can be seen throughout history, and this role does not confine to offering access to important texts for scholarship and religious purposes. Translation can be viewed as a multidisciplinary field of work as it actually incorporates "the combining work in linguistics, literary studies, cultural history, philosophy, and anthropology" (Bassnett xi).

One of the paramount conditions for translating fiction is the flawless mastering of the language, of the culture, of the history of a people, as well as of the customs and traditions described in the original, otherwise the translator risks distorting the features of the character, of the national specificity of the writer's inspired creation. Consequently, one of the most important achievements of an appropriate translation is the excellent knowledge of the two languages and cultures. The importance of the translator is fundamental and S. Bassnett says that the translator "must be concerned with the particular use of *spirit* [or any other word] in the sentence itself, in the sentence in its structural relation to other sentences, and in the overall textual and cultural contexts of the sentence" (20-1).

In conclusion, a translator's work is not at all an easy one; on the contrary it is a laborious one since a translator must be simultaneously immersed in two different texts: the SL text and the TL text. This means being immersed in two different languages and in two different cultures at the same time. A translator must not only understand the source text, but must make that text understandable to people with a completely different linguistic and cultural background. On a more subtle level, the translator must recognize the register of the source text, and must be able to preserve that register in the target text—that means being continuously aware of the tone, vocabulary, and intention of a text. Such a task is all the more important when dealing with a literary work or text and the nonobservance of such rules and tasks can only lead to failure in translation, to errors of interpretation and to losses of the rendition of the source text, thus errors can easily occur — a situation which unfortunately cannot be repaired.

The general conclusion that can be drawn is that there cannot be a perfect translation, but there can be made efforts to try to find the best version of rendering a text from the SL into the TL. All these analyses can help a translator find the best choice for a challenging situation. Translators can also use the interpretation of other critics, the options of other native speakers of both the SL and the TL, and the help of numerous dictionaries, but this type of support is limited in ideas. To all these, one must add the huge trap of computer-assisted systems of translation and the limitations that come along, especially when the translator is not a professional and cannot therefore perceive the limitations that could occur.

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