

CULTURAL MODELS IN COMMUNICATION AND TRANSLATION

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The words "culture" and "translation" are being increasingly linked. Interculturalists, such as Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, acknowledge the fact that they have seldom found two or more groups of individuals having the same suggestions relating to the concept of culture.

Two American anthropologists, Alfred Louis Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, compiled a list of 164 definitions and their own definition of culture was the following:

"Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. Culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning elements of future action".

One of the most quoted definitions of culture was conceived by the English anthropologist Edward Barnet Tylor: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (qtd. in Katan 2004: 25).

David Katan makes a clear distinction between acquisition, which is the natural and unconscious learning of language, behaviour, belief and values, and learning, which he considers to be formal and consciously taught. The culture under discussion here is acquired before the formal learning of culture at school.

According to Nancy Bonvillain, people use words to express attitudes about their surrounding world and their own culture. The author defines such culturally shared attitudes, built on people's ideas about the world they live in, as cultural models. She also asserts that cultural models can be both expressed through proverbs (e.g. "don't cry over split milk") or daily communicative interaction. The words that people use have different meanings; they can have *concrete*, *metaphoric* or *symbolic* significance.

"Taken together, cultural meanings and models form a unique worldview, providing both an understanding of the world as it is thought to be and a blueprint for the way one ought to behave. Reality is not absolute or abstract; it is lived within familiar contexts of social behaviour and cultural meanings" (Bonvillain 2003: 47).

Katan also emphasizes that models have an utmost importance in understanding how culture functions. He defines modeling as "a process that simplifies how a system functions" (Katan 2004: 38).

Fons Trompenaars' interpretation of culture is in the form of a model consisting of three 'layers of culture': the outer layer, the middle layer and the core. The outer layer, which Trompenaars calls 'explicit', is the most visible layer and comprises the artefacts and

products. The middle layer makes the distinction between norms, which concern social rules of conduct, and values, which may never be attained. Finally, Trompenaars defines the core of culture 'implicit'. As opposed to the outer layer, the heart of culture is unreachable and it consists of basic assumptions about life which have been handed down unconsciously from generation to generation.

Like Trompenaars, Edward T. Hall has a tripartite view of culture. He also admits that there is a strong connection between studies on meaning in language and meaning in culture. In "The Hidden Dimension" (1982), he proposed a model which he defines as the 'Triad of Culture'. Hall's Triad comprises three levels of culture: the technical culture, the formal culture and the informal or out-of-awareness culture.

At the technical level, communication is scientific and explicit. As regards translation, the translator's task is very easy; s/he has to convey only the dictionary denotative meanings of words. Therefore, negotiation of meaning is reduced to the minimum. Peter Newmark sustains the same idea and affirms that "No language, no culture is so *primitive* that it cannot embrace the terms of, say, computer technology" (Katan 2004: 8). In "Translation and Translating", Roger Bell approaches the issue of the denotative meaning of words. He sustains that denotation "tends to be described as the definitional, literal, obvious or commonsense meaning of a sign" (Katan 2004: 8).

The second level of culture is no longer objective. Hall terms it 'formal' and is made up of traditions, rules, customs and so on. Individuals, as representatives of their culture, are not generally aware of the routines of life.

For instance, in both the Romanian and English societies, when two friends meet, they may greet each other in different ways. In the English society, they may use words or expressions such as: "How are you?" or "What's happening?". These interrogations do not refer to the addressee's personal problems, but they are considered to be simply routine. In the Romanian society, the greeting "Ce faci?" expresses the same routine. As an outcome of this situation, people have to take into consideration the social purposes of certain words and expressions so that they could behave appropriately.

At this level of culture, the text is no longer the authority. Translators must be aware of the customs, habits and traditions of the two cultures they are mediating for. They need to be well informed about the cultures they are working with, including the popular culture (the culture's heroes, TV personalities and so on).

The third level of culture is described by E.T. Hall as informal or out-of-awareness. The latter term was introduced by the psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan in order to differentiate between that part of personality that we are aware of and that part which is distinguished by the others but is out of our own awareness. According to Hall, this is the "not what-he-said but how-he-said it" level (Katan 2004: 46). In "Translating Texts from Theory to Practice", Margherita Ulrych points out that individuals judge and respond to words at the level of connotative meaning. She regards them as "culturally or socially determined value judgements that are implicit in the semantics of a word" (Ulrych 1992: 254). In Roland Barthes' view (1967), connotation involves understanding the full meaning of the context. Unlike denotation, connotation changes according to age, gender, class, ethnicity, etc. Hence, the efficiency of connotation consists in the ability of the writer to link the text to the out-of-awareness model of the world.

The informal or out-of-awareness level of culture is the level at which the translator should intervene and mediate. The concept of mediation is defined by Basil Hatim and Ian Mason as "a useful way of looking at translator's decisions regarding the transfer of intertextual reference" (1990: 128, 223-24). They also assert that a 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”.

In the chapter entitled “The Translator as Mediator”, the two authors mention two situations in which a translator becomes a mediator. On one hand, the translator has a bi-cultural vision in order to identify and rectify the gap between sign and value across cultures. On the other hand, the translator is a critical reader of the source language (SL) text. Before starting the process of translating, s/he has the advantage of reading the source text carefully and, therefore is in the position to help the target reader to have a complete understanding of the original. Hans Vermeer also asserts that the translator is bi-cultural and a mediator of intercultural communication. Consequently, cultural mediators should be aware of their own cultural identity and they also need to understand the way their own culture influences perception.

The next model of culture is suggested by Geert Hofstede who is one of the most influential authors in the field. As compared with Trompenaars and Hall who both have a tripartite view of culture, Hofstede’s model has two layers: superficial and deeper corresponding to practices and values. Hofstede considers that values constitute the heart of culture and places symbols, heroes and rituals under practices.

The first level of practices is represented by symbols. Hofstede defines symbols as signs which communicate a meaning. Then, he states that symbols (or semiotic signs) belong to a group such as words, gestures, objects, dress, etc. Many bilinguals change languages easily but it does not necessarily imply a cultural switch. They prove themselves to be bilingual but not bi-cultural.

The second level of practices is embodied by heroes. Hofstede concentrates upon the way television creates culturally role models. For instance, Superman symbolizes the belief of a particular culture in the superhero. It is very hard to imagine Superman as being the national hero of any other culture. There are situations, though, when heroes are pan-cultural. For instance, there are a lot of similarities between the children’s heroes in Italy and those in the USA. Italians consider Mickey Mouse (or Topolino) to be their own Italian hero. In fact, all the Disney characters have been adopted by Italy and become part of their national culture.

Finally, Hofstede places rituals under practices. He asserts that rituals are “technically superfluous in reaching desired ends, but within a culture, are considered as socially essential” (Katan 2004: 46).

Each nation has its own introductory ritual. Italians, when meeting each other, tend to discuss about family, health and personal appearance. English are inclined to comment on activities and routines, while Malaysians open conversations with the following question: “Have you eaten yet?”.

Then, Hofstede assumes that symbols, heroes and rituals are invisible and “their cultural meaning, however, is invisible and lies precisely and only in the way these meanings are interpreted by the insiders. The core of culture ... is formed by values” (Katan 2004: 42).

Therefore, cultural models may be slightly or more different from one another. They are extremely important in translation because the translation has to consider all the aspects of a cultural model.

However, the translator’s knowledge of all these cultural models is necessary. That is to say, Hofstede’s model seems very complex and useful in the translating process. I consider that all the layers (both the superficial and the deeper ones) of Hofstede’s cultural model has an utmost importance in translation, in crossing the cultural barriers. Getting through the superficial layer of symbols and heroes, to the deeper layers of rituals and values, the translator has to know very well what is specific both to the SLC (source language culture) and to the TLC (target language culture).

For example, in translating “Amintiri din copilărie”, Ana Cartianu and Mark Johnson had to render the language referring to some Romanian rituals in such a way that it could be understood by the native speakers of English very well.

Comparing the two sample texts below, and generally speaking, two parallel corpora, it is obvious that the translator had to use approximate English equivalents just because such a ritual is not specific to the British culture.

AMINTIRI DIN COPILĂRIE
de Ion Creangă

“Când mama nu mai putea de obosită și se lăsa câte oleacă ziua să se hodinească, noi băieții tocmai atunci **ridicam casa în slavă**. Când venea tata noaptea de la pădure din Dumesnicu, înghețat de frig și plin de promoroacă, noi îl spăriam sărindu-i în spate pe întuneric. Și el, cât era de ostenit, ne prindea câte unul, ca la baba-oarba, ne rădica în grindă, zicând: „**Tăta mare!**” și ne săruta mereu pe fiecare. Iar după ce **se aprindea opaițul** și tata se punea să mănânce, noi scoteam **mățele de prin ocnite și cotruță și le flocăiam și le șmotream dinaintea lui, de le mergea colbul**, și nu puteau scăpa bietele mățe din mâinile noastre, până ce nu ne zgâriau și **ne stupeau** ca pe noi.

MEMORIES OF MY BOYHOOD
translated by Ana Cartianu & Mark Johnston

Whenever mother was tired out and lay down a while to rest, we children **would raise the roof**. When father came home at night from the wood, at Dumeniscu, frozen stiff and covered with hoarfrost, we would give him a fright by springing upon him, from behind, in the dark. And he, tired though he was, would catch hold of us, one by one, as in a game of blindman's buff, and would lift us to the ceiling saying: “**What a tall boy!**” and he would kiss us to his heart's content. When the **rushlight was lit** and father sat down to his meal, **we would fetch the cats from their nooks in the stove or under the oven and we would rumple their fur and drill them before him so thoroughly that they had a rough time of it**; and they couldn't get away, poor cats, before they had scratched and **spat at us** as we deserved.

Equivalents such as: “What a tall boy!”; “would rumple their fur and drill them”; “would raise the roof”; “spat at us” do not render the meanings of the Romanian words because there is no corresponding reality in the British culture.

Therefore, the translator has to render a certain reality by what is specific to the TLC. Creangă's works in translation illustrates the idea that translation is the exploration of a gap between cultures. The translator's task is to mediate between language cultures in converting LC1 (language culture) into LC2. Culture-specific elements are very difficult to translate because the translator does not simply search for an equivalent, but he tries to express the same reality into the TL (target language).

The conclusion is that the translator must be faithful to the tradition from which he translates and be aware of the writer's intentions.

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