LANGUAGE, POWER, TRANSLATION AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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1. Contemporary culture. Focus on language

Cultural models (or culturally shared attitudes) are rooted in people's ideas about the world they live in. Although potentially transmittable in a variety of ways, cultural models are mainly passed on via language. The linguistic transmission of culture may take overt forms (proverbs, myths, legends) or covert ones (through daily communicative interaction), both linked to the core notion of reality – which is neither absolute nor abstract, but experienced "within familiar contexts of social behaviour and cultural meanings." (Bonvillain 2003: 47)

As pointed out by renowned scholars in linguistic anthropology, "the worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels" (Sapir 1949: 162). Furthermore, the "concepts of time and matter are not given in substantially the same form by experience to all people, but depend upon the nature of the language or languages through the use of which they have been developed" (Whorf 1939: 135). In other words, communication through language is only partly efficient cross-culturally, since consensual referentiality remains on slippery ground and people's perception of / interaction with the world around is intertwined with the possibilities of having it expressed.

On a larger scale, if initially culture and language have grown together and have mutually influenced one another, this state of correlation has gradually been lost, as cultures have evolved much more rapidly than languages and as we are observably moving towards a phase where "the forms of language will in course of time cease to symbolise those of culture." (Sapir op. cit: 102)

In our global world today, the prophecy seems to actually take place: English as lingua franca mainly serves culturally empty communicative purposes in the pragmatic, mostly money-oriented documents circulating around the globe; scientific and technological development has led to a new, international vocabulary and to new language patterns and structures in the global language thus emerging (mostly resembling English, if not English outright); power relations breathe through the language thus enforced on many or all the linguistic communities of the world, taking on a more markedly political than cultural component; global English is increasingly practiced outside the native speaker boundaries, modifying core/native linguistic specificities. As a second, rather than foreign language, English is also intensively acquiring new forms, covering new ground, taking on a multimedia component.

In this respect, two opinions in particular stay in mind:

• Alastair Pennycock's: "What I think is sorely lacking from the predominant paradigm of investigation into English as an international language is a broad range of social, historical, cultural and political relationships. There is a failure to problematise the notion of choice and

an assumption that individuals and countries are somehow free of economic, political and ideological constraints." (in J. W. Tollefson 1995: 38)

- Stuart Campbell's: "The inhabitants of the colonial and economic empires are translating back into English in ever-increasing quantities, and we cannot sit back and pretend they will go away." (in Anderman & Rogers 2005: 36)

English as lingua franca remains a controversial issue. On the one hand, it might help individual nations gain an international profile. On the other, the coexistence of a national and an international language gives rise to numerous problems. The recurrent arguments brought in relation to English as a lingua franca are the following (in Anderman & Rogers op. cit: 1-4):

- *Linguistic imperialism or linguistic hegemony.* In the European context, as the use of English in cross-national communication makes inroads into an increasing number of specialist domains and activities, more and more voices warn on the risk of erosion of the European Union commitment to cultural and linguistic diversity of its member states.

- *Global English: language change and language use.* In the process of becoming common property, English is turning into a hybrid language, sometimes referred to as Eurospeak within the European Union and more broadly as McLanguage, reflecting the global nature of the modern commercial world.

- *English and translation.* The influence of English on the languages of Europe has important implications for translation. In the particular case of literature, for instance, for European literature to travel successfully in translation into English, adjustments are often required to ensure that European literary imports fit the literary traditions prevailing in the receiving Anglophone target culture, at the cost of reducing the element of foreignness in the original.

- *Language learning and teaching.* Recently, there has been serious decline in interest among European students in the study of modern languages, English included. (As already mentioned, it tends to become a second language rather than a foreign one). Nevertheless, employment is sooner available to those with knowledge of one or more languages. As for teaching, if previously the emphasis was on developing listening and speaking skills, with the emergence of a European lingua franca, a shift to reading and translation skills has become imperative.

- *Pragmalinguistics.* A successful cross-national exchange often requires pragmatic, as well as linguistic competence. In the act of communication, knowledge of a shared lingua franca does facilitate social interaction, but additional factors come into play, affecting the way speakers make use of a language other than their own and the way first-language interlocutors interact in such situations. Of considerable importance is an understanding of the prevailing social and cultural traditions which speakers, unwittingly, bring with them from their own language to a communicative situation.

2. Glocalising power structures

When the focus is on translation into and from English, but also into and from Romanian, and when the method of approach is one which presupposes a multidisciplinary perspective both on translation as process and on translation as product, another issue that needs tackling is that of minority languages. In the global setting, minority languages are under a lot of pressure from authoritarian major languages (empowered by the geopolitical status of their speakers as nations) and can succumb at lexical and syntactic levels so that over time, through imitation, they lose their specificity and become mirror images of the dominant language. As a consequence of continuous imitation and translation, they themselves can no longer be translated, as there seems to be nothing left to translate.

Today, exploring the effects of translation on minority languages is paramount because of the surviving spoken form and the dwindling numbers of speakers of many

languages. It has been pointed out that up to half of the 6,000 languages spoken on the planet are endangered or on the brink of extinction. Some linguists claim that a language dies somewhere in the world every two weeks. In this context of increasing linguistic poverty, translation assumes a profoundly ambiguous role, being looked upon as both predator and deliverer, enemy and friend. The status of translation in majority languages emerges against the ground of translation in minority languages and one cannot be considered in complete isolation from the other. Furthermore, if translation is perceived from the perspective of minority languages, it needs to be discussed in terms of assimilation or diversification.

      With regard to its practice, taking into account the many processes at the heart of translation today, it seems appropriate to oppose translation as reflection to translation as reflexion, rather than universalise one particular strategy. The first term is defined as the unconscious imbibing of a dominant language that produces the numerous calques that inform languages. The second term refers to second degree reflection or meta-reflection which should properly be the business of translation scholars and practitioners, namely the critical consideration of what a language absorbs and what allows it to expand and what causes it to retract, to lose the synchronic and diachronic range of its expressive resources. (in Cronin 2003: 141-142)

      Translation theory and translation practice have developed on the basis of the European linguistic and cultural experience. Implicitly, they rely on the postulate of an egalitarian relationship between different linguistic and cultural areas and need to be informed by the latest findings in sociology and politology to raise pertinent questions regarding interculturality in the colonial and postcolonial contexts.

      Another aspect that deserves close consideration in as far as translation from and into minority languages is concerned is that it has become not only central to experience, but a question of survival as well. Quality translations offer the speakers of minority languages the possibility of building self-confidence, of communicating on their self-perception and of cultivating their culture through the preservation of their language. Against the background of relationships of language and power, inevitable in the contemporary world, translation theory should not restrict itself to focus on the major languages and the theories they have inspired, but grow in the opposite direction as well, to include viewpoints from the exponents of the minority languages and the problematics they have identified in the translation process.

      As for the universally acclaimed hegemony of English (propelled along by the current technological development), it necessarily implies that all other languages have automatically become minority ones, but it also brings about the discussion on English as under pressure due to the invasion of / its contamination by highly specialised technical (thus universal) vocabulary and simplified syntax of the IT age. From this point of view, English is now experiencing what minority languages have been experiencing – another argument in favour of the necessity to reconsider the role and status of translation and translators from a different (if not opposing) standpoint, fructifying the valuable input of contributions from minority language translators.

      To sum up, Michael Cronin's observations on the issue deserve highlighting: "Minority languages have a fundamentally paradoxical relationship with translation. As languages operating in a multilingual world with vastly accelerated information flows from dominant languages, they must translate continually in order to retain their viability and relevance as living languages. Yet translation itself may in fact endanger the very specificity of those languages that practice it, particularly in situations of diglossia. The situation of translation in the culture of a minority language is therefore highly ambiguous. The ambiguity is partly related to the functions of translation in the minority language culture. These can be broadly divided into the pragmatic and aesthetic functions." (op. cit: 146-147)

3. The policies and politics of intercultural communication

In the context of the European Union, multilingualism is declared a fundamental principle, which confers equal rights to all the official languages spoken in the enlarged European community. This is envisaged to entail the democratisation of communication, in languages which are part of and preserve national and personal identities within the common economic and political frame established on the continent (according to yet another fundamental principle: unity in diversity).

The institutions of the European Union produce legislation that is directly applicable to all citizens in all member states and must therefore be available in their official languages. Consequently, translation is needed at all the many stages in the preparation of community legislation:

• preparing the working papers which often include a substantial amount of technical documentation;

• examining the draft versions, which require extensive consultation;

• putting together the final text which represents a commitment by the Commission and is likely to reach a broad spectrum of readers;

• preparing the written information that the Commission is required to circulate at all levels once its proposal has been adopted;

• discussing and amending the proposal in the European Parliament and Council prior to finalisation (Wagner 2002: 1)

All these stages must be accessed by all their actants and addressees, and in order for this to be possible, versions in languages that people understand must be produced. This is the task that translators are asked to undertake so that multiple authenticity of the issued documents emerge and the national language and identity of all member states be recognised. Nonetheless, it has been pointed out that there are three underlining common myths about multilingualism, myths that are easily deconstructed when the actual practice of translation at European level is considered:

• Myth 1: all EU documents are translated into all the official languages (although it would be common-sensical to produce translations only if/when needed);

• Myth 2: multilingualism absorbs a huge proportion of the EU budget (actually, only 5.25% go into administration, that translation and interpretation are part of);

• Myth 3: it would be easy to reduce the number of working languages (it would be simpler to have official languages for legislation and working languages for use in meetings, but because of national sensitivities, that is not possible; there is only talk of procedural languages – English, French and German – but the concept is not mentioned by the legislation or the rules of procedure). (Wagner op. cit: 9-10)

With regard to the politics involved in intercultural communication, the challenges of trespassing language barriers do not stop at mastery of the basics of language learning, as represented by the learning of words and grammar, as well as the development of a good accent. Both in the case of communication between English as mother tongue for some and second language for others, and in the case of communication in English as a second language for all participants in the communicative act, intercultural awareness remains a must.

If we agree with Peter Newmark that there is "no global communication without translation" (in Anderman & Rogers 2003: 55-67), then we need to look deeper into the types of translation in practice today and at the pretexts and contexts they function within. According to Newmark, the three most obvious and frequently met translation types are: literary translation, non-literary translation and social translation. The latter category, less dwelt upon, is the child of the present times, times of "unprecedented migration and

minorities, of asylum seekers, flights, refugees, civil wars, the voluntary movement of gypsies, travelers and romanies, secessions etc" (in op. cit: 61).

Added to it is what may be called institutional or work-place translation, which stems from the need for glocal/multinational enterprises or global/regional networking in view of encouraging collaboration and partnerships, and which, for the most part, takes place into and from English. Whether one represents a nation in the European Parliament, appeals to the European Court of Human Rights, works in a multinational company, goes to receive health care abroad, travels for business or pleasure elsewhere in the world, is in the educational system either as a teacher or as a student, is involved in artistic activities, sets up businesses supported by European funds or carries out research in cooperation with other European teams, one necessarily has to have a certain amount of information/ a certain number of documents translated.

4. The challenges of translation as mediation

Translation into and from hegemonic English cannot simply be approached from the perspective of traditional translation theory. As already suggested, the many cross-cultural contexts and regional/global interaction specific to the contemporary scene have generated the need to reconsider the role and status of translations and translators. Firstly, it is a question of focusing on language management today: language change, language use, linguistic contamination /colonisation. Secondly, it is one of viewing text production, mediation and reception within the frame of the various power relations worldwide. Lastly, it is one of raising cultural awareness and having it communicated efficiently across frontiers of time and space.

Consequently, recent trends in translation studies favour the broader interpretation of multimedia translation, which has extended the traditional borders to encompass various translation modes, and to view it in interdisciplinary terms. Multimedia translation studies include contributions from media and communication studies, cultural studies, social and political studies, semiotics, information technology etc. (in Ulrych 1999: 36-37) Although translation may be considered as the quintessence of intercultural communication, it features processes that distinguish it from other types of linguistic interaction and that contribute towards its specificity, and it is multimedia translation studies that forward research instruments which enable both the investigation of translation as a phenomenon per se and the analysis of the translated text as communicative endeavour.

Opposing the traditionalist view of translation as interlingual endeavour focusing on formal equivalence, present day multimedia translation studies foreground the intertextual or intercultural component, with emphasis on functional equivalence. Theory and practice come together under the umbrella term of translation studies as a theory of communication extended to all discourse genres and text types (Newmark 1981: 2), in which both the product and the process are carefully looked into.

To return to the central issue of globalisation, what has retained our attention is the theory according to which not every part of the planet will experience globalisation at the same time or in the same way, so that within a context of multiple modernities it is more proper to talk not so much about translation *and* globalisation as about globalisation *as* translation. This is to suggest that there is no single model of globalisation which is automatically adopted by different nation states, but that each country or community translates elements of the global and informational economy into local circumstances. The result is the nationally and regionally differentiated experiences of globalisation across the planet. As for translation, it is not simply a by-product of globalisation, but a constituent, integral part of how the phenomenon operates and makes sense of itself.

Like cultural phenomena, translation is subject to change. Without it, translation is nothing but mere citation, a passive enterprise lacking initiative. So translators (as architects

of vernacular languages and cultures, and as underground cultural agents and mediators) are asked to both promote a culture and creatively undermine it. The cultural clash has positive effects on translators and their translations, but this is paralleled by the fact that foreign elements continually generate their own unease. The more a translator is knowledgeable about the source culture and language, the less able s/he becomes to render the cultural difference in another language. The dependence of acculturation destabilises the independence of translation, itself frequently characterized as unbecoming dependency.

Besides the cultural transfer at the heart of translation, another main feature of translation today is that it abides by a politics of time. The contemporary chronopolitics of translation looks into the incessant terminological creation in English as a consequence of technological developments and the reorganisation of the global economic space: the faster the rate of technical innovation, the greater the inflation of language to account for this innovation, and the more spectacular the growth of the English lexicon. The result of the application of new technology worldwide, space-time compression helps to disseminate, at ever greater speeds the language of machines, money and cultural capital. A significant outcome is what one might term the chrono-stratification of world languages: lexical creation with certain languages happens at great speed, while with other languages this takes place at a considerably slow pace, with an impact on the development and representation of languages in question.

If languages are affected by the chronopolitics of globalisation, it necessarily follows that the role of translation and the status of translators are also undergoing change in the global age. As Michael Cronin suggests, translators are, above everything else, mediators and the principal aim of translation (as of all systems of mediation) is to make themselves transparent and simple to use despite the complexity of their delivery: the better the translation, the more successful the medium and the more invisible the mediator. (op. cit. 124-125)

On the new translation market, the traditional areas are being affected by the Internet, as entirely new types of language support requirements have risen from it (web localisation, web navigation, web search) and new communication modes have become part of our daily life (e-mail, text-based chat, voice-based chat). Interactive translation on the web, that Ashworth (1997) calls "transinterpreting" (to describe what is needed to assist inter-lingual text-chat), implies that language support for this mode of communication is a hybrid that involves translating text, but doing it synchronously, as in interpreting.

The translating industry has gone global, championing what is now known as the telework mode. The outcome has been the emergence of two new characteristics of language support known as teletranslation and teleinterpretation, whose main qualities lie in speed digital content, IT device-friendly, quality, price, mixed modality of text and voice, value-addedness, comprehensive globalisation service.

In connection with translation-mediated communication, globalisation may be defined as: "a process to enable the Message to be adaptable to the condition that may be imposed by Receivers who do no share the same linguistics and cultural backgrounds as the sender". In turn, the term localisation can be defined as "a process to facilitate globalisation by addressing linguistic and cultural barriers specific to the Receivers who do no share the same linguistics and cultural backgrounds as the sender". The extensive adaptation of the Message normally employed in localisation supports the role of Translation as domestication, as opposed to foreignisation. (in O'Hagan & Ashworth: 66-69)

5. Concluding remarks
The real-isation of the fictions of translation, that is the unveiling of misconceptions regarding the role and status of translations and translators, may only be possible if endeavours are undertaken to understand language as functioning within a complex of

power relations and as a power structure in its own right, to accept that intercultural communication today cannot be reduced to applications of linguistic expertise, to view these mediating phenomena from a multidisciplinary perspective, in close connection with the policies and politics governing them and with the contemporary dominance of the various media.

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