

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN TRANSLATION THEORIES

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### ABSTARCT

The article shows some theories by linguists and scholars about the role of language and culture during the translating a text or a sentence. Moreover, it illustrates historical background of translation theories.

**Keywords:** translational problems, ideas by scholars, source text, target language, source culture, subculture.

The process of translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions. As this statement implies, translators are permanently faced with the problem of how to treat the cultural aspects implicit in a source text (ST) and of finding the most appropriate technique of successfully conveying these aspects in the target language (TL). These problems may vary in scope depending on the cultural and linguistic gap between the two (or more) languages concerned<sup>1</sup>

One of the problems a translator can face arises from the fact that some words or phrases denoting objects, facts, phenomena, etc... are so deeply rooted in their source culture (SC) and so specific (and perhaps exclusive or unique) to the culture that produced them that they have no equivalent in the target culture (TC). When discussing the problems of correspondence in translation, "differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure.

The power of language to reflect culture and influence thinking was first proposed by an American linguist and anthropologist, Edward Sapir (1884-1939), and his student, Benjamin Whorf (1897-1941). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis stated that the way we think and view the world is determined by our language<sup>2</sup>). Instances of cultural language differences are evidenced in that some languages have specific words for concepts whereas other languages use several words to represent a specific concept. For example, the Arabic language includes many specific words for designating a certain type of horse or camel. To make such distinctions in English, where specific words do not exist, adjectives would be used preceding the concept label, such as quarter horse or dray horse.

Cultural differences have also been noted in the ways in which language is used pragmatically. In our culture, new language skills are typically taught and learned

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<sup>1</sup> Nida Eugene "Toward a science translating"(1964: p130)

<sup>2</sup> Andersen.S.R ,Lightfoot D.W "Linguistics as a cognitive psysiology"(2002:p98)

through verbal instruction, while in some cultures, these skills are learned through nonverbal observation. A distinction has also been made between cultures that encourage independent learning and those that encourage cooperative learning.

Differences in the social roles of adults and children also influence how language is used. Home and school contexts may represent different cultures, subcultures, or both and may influence language acquisition in noticeable ways. Nonverbal cues (e.g. facial expression) and contextual cues (e.g. shared experience) have different communicative roles in different cultures<sup>3</sup>. Children may be expected, and thus taught, to speak only when an adult addresses them. They are not encouraged to initiate conversations with adults or to join spontaneously in ongoing adult conversations. Additionally, in some cultures, children who enthusiastically volunteer answers at school are considered show-offs. In some cultural settings, children are not asked recitational questions. Instead, they are asked only questions of clarification or for new information. Thus, when these children experience recitational questions in a school setting, they may be confused as to the purpose of the questioning and the expected response.

In the United States, Bereiter and Englemann conducted further research from the verbal-deficit perspective. They focused on the language of preschool African American children in Illinois. Bereiter and Engleman concluded that the language used by African American children was not a valid language and thus recommended that these children needed to be taught English in the school setting. Academically oriented preschool curricula were developed to provide the needed English language training for verbally deficient children.

Tough conducted a longitudinal study of children from advantaged (college-educated, professional parents) and disadvantaged (parents who were in unskilled or semiskilled occupations) homes. The study began when the children were 3 years old, with follow-up at 5-12 years. At age 3, the disadvantaged children and the advantaged children showed significant differences in the ways they used language. Specifically, the disadvantaged children did not use language to recall and give details of prior experiences, anticipate upcoming events and possible outcomes, reason about current and remembered events, problem solve using language for planning and considering alternatives, reach solutions, create and sustain dramatic play events, and understand others' experiences and feelings. When these children were studied again the disadvantaged children produced shorter, less complex responses. This research contributed to our understanding that children from different cultural environments may be learning to use language differently and may experience difficulty in participating in the language environment in classrooms.

Further awareness of the role of cultural environments in the acquisition of language was influenced in the 1980s by ethnographic research techniques that were used by language researchers. Ethnographic studies have contributed significantly to our understanding of linguistic diversity. Ethnography uses participant observation in real-life settings and focuses on individuals within their social and cultural contexts.

In all cases, when cultural differences exist between the two languages, it is extremely difficult to achieve a successful transfer, if not impossible (whatever the competence of the translator in the two languages involved). And even the slightest variation from the source language (SL)

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<sup>3</sup>Keiser Barbara, Rasminsky Sklar "Challenging behaviour in children"(2007:p8)

cultural term can be taken as an act of subversion against the culture it represents. Literary translation itself can even be regarded as an act of subversion, or a means of providing an alternative or sub-version of reality. As Levine affirms, "the literary translator can be considered a subversive scribe can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its centre, the structure of natural language"<sup>4</sup>.

Bassnett underlines the importance of this double consideration when translating by stating that language is "the heart within the body of culture," the survival of both aspects being interdependent. Linguistic notions of transferring meaning are seen as being only part of the translation process; "a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria" must also be considered. As Bassnett further points out, "the translator must tackle the SL text in such a way that the TL version will correspond to the SL version. To attempt to impose the value system of the SL culture onto the TL culture is dangerous ground"<sup>5</sup>. Thus, when translating, it is important to consider not only the lexical impact on the TL reader, but also the manner in which cultural aspects may be perceived and make translating decisions accordingly.

Translation services link one language to another by taking careful consideration of the social groups involved, this is very difficult and can be done wrong if one is not careful. As cultures are increasingly brought into larger connection one with another, multicultural considerations are brought to tolerance to an ever-increasing degree. We are not just dealing with words written in a certain time, but with the aspect of the text as well.

Vast cultural differences play a role, because it has had an impact on nearly all the people worldwide, as well as on the international relations rising from the present new world order. Also, as technology develops and grows at a fast pace, nations and their cultures have started merging. Boundaries are becoming more unclear, when they once were sharply outlined. Translators offering translation services today are faced with many different cultures. They are required to provide translation services that relay messages from one culture to another, and make it a smooth and solidly understood translation. The idiosyncrasies and cultural expressions must be known first hand. We are not talking about a minimum knowledge of having studied the language, but about a vast and thorough understanding of having the language as a native tongue. It's referred to as cross-cultural translation and it's relied upon heavily by organizations around the globe.

It is their task to focus primarily on the source culture and target culture, but this is not cut and dry. The answer is not clear-cut. Nevertheless, the dominant criterion is the communicative function of the target text. Attention is drawn to the fact that among the assortment of translation methodology, the use of the integrated approaches. This approach follows the model in which having a global vision of the text, at hand, is of primary importance.

In addition, the trans-coding process should be focused not merely on language transfer but also - and most importantly on cultural transposition. As an inevitable consequence of the previous statement, translators must be both bilingual and bicultural if not multicultural. When dealing with diverse cultures it can sometimes be the simple mistakes we make, like showing the soles of our shoes or giving a thumbs up, that can ruin a relationship or lose a very important client.

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<sup>4</sup> Guerra A.F "Translating culture problems, strategies and practical realities"

<sup>5</sup> Bassnett, S. "Translation studies" 1996: p 23)

Learning the similarities and differences in customs or traditions, or seeking the professional help of a translation services agency can make all the difference.

Many scholars agree with the fact that language is an expression of culture and individuality of its speakers and have, hence, deeply examined cultural terms, as well as the problems involved in their translation when there is a lack of equivalence between two languages and cultures.

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