

What is lost and gained in translation

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Abstract

Once the principle that equality between two languages cannot exist is accepted, it becomes possible to approach the issue of what is lost and what is gained during the translation process. Again this shows the low status of the translation, as a lot of time must have been spent discussing what is lost during the transfer of a text from the source language to the translation language, while ignoring what can be gained, because the translator can often enrich or clarify the text in the Source Language, as a direct result of the translation process. Moreover, what is often seen as a "loss" from the context of the Source Language can be replaced in the context of the Translation Language, as occurs in Petrarch's translations by White and Surrey.

Keywords: languages, equality, translation process, loss and gain.

Introduction

Eugen Nida is a rich source of information on the problems of loss during translation, especially for the difficulties encountered by the translator when confronted with terms or concepts in the Source Language, which do not exist in the Translation Language. He cites the case of the South Venezuelan language, where the translator has some difficulty finding satisfactory terms instead of English ones: fatigue, stealing, lying, etc., but where terms for good, ugly, beautiful cover a very wide field of different meanings. As an example, he points out that this language does not correspond to the dictatorial classification of "good" and "bad", but the trictomic one, as follows.

(1) *Good* -The good includes desirable food, killing enemies, chewing drugs to keep calm, beating one's spouse to teach one to obey, and stealing from anyone who does not belong to the same gang.

(2) *Bad* - Evil includes rotten fruit, any object with a cane, the murder of a member of the same gang, the theft by a member of the honorable family, and the deception of anyone.

(3) *Violating taboo* - Violation of the taboo includes incest, approaching the mother-in-law, eating the tapir by a married woman before the birth of the first child, and eating rodents by the children.

It is also not necessary to look far beyond Europe to find examples that carry such a differentiation. The large number of terms in Finland for snow variations, in Arabic for aspects of camel behavior, in English for light and water, in French for the types of bread the translator has to deal with, and this, on a plane, constitutes a problem of untranslatability. Translations of the Bible have documented other additional difficulties, such as the concept of the Trinity or the social significance of parables in certain cultures. In addition to lexical problems, there are definitely languages that do not have a time system or concepts of the time, which can match one way or another

with Indo-European systems. The comparison of Warf (which may not be reliable, but is cited here as a theoretical example) between a “temporary language” (English) and a “perpetual language” (Hopi) serves to illustrate this aspect¹.

Untranslatability

Whenever the translator encounters such difficulties, the whole question of the flexibility of the text arises. Ketford distinguishes two types of untranslatability, which he calls linguistic and cultural. At the linguistic level, untranslatability appears when there are no lexical or syntactic substitutes in the Translation Language for the unit in the Source Language. So, for example, the sentence in German *Um wieviel Uhr darf man Sie morgen wecken?* or the sentence in Danish *leg fandt brevet* linguistically is untranslatable, because both sentences include structures that do not live in Albanian. However, both can be translated into Albanian correctly if the rules of the Albanian structure are applied. The translator, without a doubt, would translate both sentences as *Kur dëshiron të zgjohesh nesër?* and *E gjeta letrën*, restructuring the word order in German and adapting the place of the prominent node that comes after the name in Danish in accordance with the norms of Albanian.

Ketford's category of linguistic untranslatability, which is also proposed by Popovic, is direct, but the second category defined by him is more problematic. Linguistic untranslatability, he argues, occurs due to the lack in the Translational Language of a situational feature appropriate to the text in the Original Language. He cites the example of different concepts of the term “bathroom” in an English, Finnish or Japanese context, where both the object itself and the use of the object are not at all similar. But Ketford also argues that even more abstract lexical units, such as the English term “home” or “democracy”, cannot be described as untranslatable, and argues that expressions in English *I'm going home*, or *He's at home* can “Translate immediately with translation equivalents in most languages”, while the term “democracy” is internationalism.

Now, on one level, Ketford is right. Expressions in English can be translated into most European languages, and “democracy” is a term used internationally. But he avoids taking into account two important factors, and this seems to typify the problem of an overly narrow approach to the issue of untranslatability.

If *I'm going home* translates into French *Je vais chez moi* and in Albanian *Po shkoj në shtëpi*, the meaning of the content of the sentence in Source Language (I mean, the expression of the sure statement of purpose to go to the apartment and / or in place of origin) reproduces only freely. And if, for example, the expression is said by an American living in London temporarily, it would mean returning to one's own “dwelling”, it would be transcending the Atlantic, that is, returning to one's country of origin, depending on the context in which it is used. this difference must be conveyed in French and Albanian. Moreover, the term in English “home”, like that in French *foyer* and in Albanian *home*, contains a range of associative meanings, which are not translated through the expression many times more limited *chez moi* or *to me*.

¹ B. L. Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality* (Selected Writings) redacted by J. B. Carroll, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1956, Page 213.

Therefore, *home* would accurately represent the same range of problems as the term *bathroom* in Finnish or Japanese.

When translating the word *democracy*, complex problems arise. Ketford feels that the term is quite present in the lexicon of many languages and, although it may be related to various political situations, the context will be the reader's guide to selecting appropriate situational features. The problem here is that the reader will acquire a concept for the term, relying on its own cultural context, and will apply this particular view accordingly. Thus, the distinction between the *democratic* adjective, as shown in the following three expressions, is fundamental to three very different political concepts:

- (1) the American Democratic Party – Partia Demokratike e Amerikës;**
- (2) the German Democratic Republic – Republika Demokratike e Gjermanisë;**
- (3) the democratic wing of the British Conservative Party – krahu demokratik i Partisë Konservatore të Britanisë.**

Thus, although the term is internationalism, its use in various contexts indicates that there is no longer a common ground from which relevant situational features can be selected. If culture is perceived as dynamic, then the terminology of social structuring must also be dynamic. Lotman emphasizes that the semiotic study of culture not only considers culture to function as a system of signs, but also emphasizes that "it is precisely the connection of culture with the sign and meaning that constitutes one of its basic typological features." Ketford departs from various premises and, because he does not exaggerate in assessing the dynamic nature of language and culture, he devalues his category of *cultural untranslatability*. As long as language is the primary modeling system within a culture, *de facto* *cultural untranslatability* must be implied in every translation process.

Darbelneti and Vinaj, in their useful work *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais (Comparative Stylistics of French and English)*², have analyzed in detail the points of linguistic difference between the two languages, differences that constitute areas where translation is impossible. But again, only Popovic tried to define the untranslatability without making a distinction between linguistic and cultural. Popovic, too, distinguishes two types.

The first is defined as:

A situation in which the linguistic elements of the original cannot be accurately replaced in structural, linear, functional, or semantic terms, as a result of a lack of denotation or connotation.

The second type goes beyond linguistic purity:

A situation in which the connection of the expression of meaning, that is, the connection between the creative subject and its linguistic expression in the original, does not find accurate linguistic expression in translation.

The first type may seem parallel to Ketford's category of linguistic untranslatability, while the second type includes expressions such as *Bon appetite* or the interesting string of expressions in Danish to express gratitude. Bredsdorf's Danish Grammar for English Readers provides elaborate details on the contextual use of such expressions. The explanation of the expression *Tak for mad*, for example, states that there is no

² J. L. Darbelnet and J. P. Vinay, *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais*, Didier, Paris, 1958.

equivalent in English, nor in Albanian, for this expression used for the lord or mistress of the house by friends or family members after eating a meal.

A slightly more difficult example is the example in the case of the Italian word *tamponamento* in the sentence *C'e stato un tamponamento*.

While English and Italian are so close that they follow a roughly similar structure of sentence organization in relation to the constituent parts and order of the words, the sentence turns out to be completely translatable. Even the conceptual plane is translatable: an event that was happening in the past is announced in the present. The difficulty is related to the translation of the Italian name, which in Albanian appears as a positive affirmative sentence and in English as a noun phrase. The translation language version, which allows for variety in Albanian and English syntax, is:

Ka ndodhur / ndodhi një aksident i lehtë (bëhet fjalë për një automjet) – There has been/there was a slight accident (involving a vehicle).

Due to differences in the use of tenses, sentences in the Translation Language may take one or two forms, depending on the context of the sentence, and, due to the length of the noun phrase, this may also be shortened, provided that the nature of the accident may be determined outside the sentence by the recipient. However, when the importance of tampons is examined in relation to Italian society as a whole, the term cannot be completely misunderstood without some knowledge of the habits of Italian drivers, the frequency of “minor accidents” and the severity and relevance of incidents, such when they occur. In short, a tamponade is a sign related to culture or contextual meaning that cannot be translated even with an explanatory expression. Therefore, the connection between the creative subject and its linguistic expression cannot be accurately replaced in translation.

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Munini acknowledges the great benefits that linguistic advances have brought to translation studies; the development of structural linguistics, the work of Sosyr, Hjelmslev, the Moscow and Prague Linguistic Circles have been of great value, and Chomsky's work and transformational linguistics have also exerted their influence, especially with regard to the study of semantics. Munini feels that, thanks to developments in contemporary linguistics, we can (and should) accept that:

- (1) personal experience is untranslatable.
- (2) in theory, the basic units of any two languages (for example, phonemes, monomials,

³ B. P. Lawendowski, 'On Semiotic Aspects of Translation', Th. Sebeok (redaktor), *Sight, Sound and Sense*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1978, Page 264-283.

etc.) are not always comparable..

(3) communication is enabled when the respective situations of the speaker and the listener, the author and the translator are taken into account.

In other words, Munini believes that linguistics proves that translation is a dialectical process, which can be accomplished with relative success.

Conclusions

Translation can always start with the clearest situations, with the most concrete messages, with the simplest universals. But, in terms of the elaboration of language in its entirety, together with its most subjective messages, through the study of general situations and the multiplication of contexts that need to be clarified, then, there is no doubt that communication through translation it cannot be completely completed, which also proves that it is not always impossible⁴.

As already suggested, the translator's task is clearly defined: the translator is required to find a solution to even the most terrible problems. These solutions can be the most varied; the translator's decision as to what constitutes invariable information about a given reference system, in itself, is a creative act. Levi emphasizes the intuitive element during translation:

As in all semiotic processes, translation has its own pragmatic dimension. Translation theory tends to be normative, giving translators instructions for optimal solutions; however, real translation work is pragmatic; the translator chooses for this one of the possible solutions, which promises the maximum effect through the minimum of effort. That is to say, he intuitively chooses the so-called Minimal-Maximum Strategy⁵.

⁴ Mounin, cited work, Page 279.

⁵ Jiff Levy, *Die literarische Übersetzung. Theorie einer Kunstgattung*, translated by Walter Schamschula, Athenaion, Frankfurt am Main, 1969.