

## **THE INTERRELATION OF CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIMENSIONS IN TRANSLATION STUDIES**

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### **Abstract**

*Our world is characterized by rapid change, increasing globalization and increasingly complex societal and cultural relations. In this sense, the knowledge of language and culture are indispensable elements for a comprehensive translation, the objective of which is to achieve the maximum benefit and best possible understanding the text. This article attempts to apply issues that go beyond linguistic aspects underlying a text and regards the cultural & contextual dimensions of the translation. Its aim is to show some changes in translation studies, from formalist approach to extra textual factors, which emphasize on broader issues like context, culture and ideology. At the same time, it shows how linguistic theories of translation have been sidelined, and attention has been centered on translation as cultural transfer by elaborating on the nature of language, culture & translation, the cultural turn and its merging with translation issues, and some pioneers of cultural turn. And finally, due to the interface of translation with other growing disciplines, some cultural studies have been explained. At the end, based on scientific theories, it comes to the conclusion that translation is not merely a linguistic activity, and it surpasses the level of words and sentences, and acts as a means of examining the role of language in a cultural and social life.*

**Key words:** *linguistic aspect, language, cultural dimension, translation, cultural turn*

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### **1. Introduction**

Human languages are inherently variable and dynamic and their shifting shapes are constrained by diverse factors. (Mey, 1998).

Translation is a useful test case for examining the whole issue of the role of language in social life. In creating a new act of communication, translators are inevitably acting under the pressure of their own social and cultural conditioning, while at the same time, trying to assist in the negotiation of meaning between the producer of the source text and the reader of the target text, both of whom exist within their own social and cultural framework. In studying this complex process, insights should be sought for taking beyond translation itself towards the whole relationship between language activity and cultural context in which it takes place. (Hatim & Mason 1990). To explain the relationship between language, culture and translation requires appreciation of the immense complexity of cultural mediation, and linguistic analysis at the high level of detail & delicacy. (Mey, 1998).

Following the above-mentioned factors, this article focuses on the interrelation of language, culture and translation. Since as most theorists, among them (Chantler & Dante, 2009) believe, most theories about translation, no longer are related to linguistics of translation as traditional translation studies, and instead extend the field of research into the cultural dimension of transposing a text from one language or semiotic code into another. At the same time, based on theoretical researches and theories as well as arguments made by theorists and scholars, the question that how translation has moved beyond the simplistic notion of being a language learn policy toward the cultural context, will be tackled, first by defining these three terms, going through the importance of culture and cultural turn and its pioneers in translation studies, and ending up with some cultural theories in translation.

## **2. Language, Culture & Translation (Definitions & Relations)**

Merriam-Webster collegiate dictionary defines language as "a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings". While linguists regard all languages as equal and arbitrary systems capable of fulfilling the same function, and believe that language is abstracted from experience in order to be better understood as a system, (Guy Cook , 2003), the notion can be expanded by regarding language as a lived experience involved with people's sense of worth and identity .

Annie Brisset in her article *"translation and cultural identity"*, defines language "as an indispensable elements in the realization of the verbal act, and a necessary precondition for communication". As Jacobson observes "the message requires a code fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee. (In other words, to the encoder and the decoder of the message". (Venuti, 2000:337)

Culture is defined as those human projects which endow the raw materials of our world including the stuff of language. (Mey, 1998). Culture is often seen as mere information conveyed by the language, not as a feature of language itself; cultural awareness becomes an objective in itself, separate from language. If language is seen as social practice, culture becomes the very core of language learning. (Cook: 105). Newmark defines culture as the way of life and its manifestation that is peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression, and distinguishes "cultural" from "universal" and "personal" language. (Newmark, 1981: 94). Adapting Nida, Newmark categorized cultural terms as: ecology, material culture, social culture, and so on. (ibid).

But before defining translation, it would be beneficial to see whether there is a relation between language and culture. Anthropologists tend to treat language as one element among others, such as beliefs, within the definition of culture as "socially acquired knowledge "; through the process of cultural transmission, it make sense to emphasize the fact that linguistic variation is tied very much to the existence of different cultures. (razmjoo2004:64); moreover, language is a means of transfer of cultural values, and the fact that languages affect each other is one aspect of the cross-cultural influence. Language is a part of culture, and in fact it is the most complex set of habits that any culture exhibits. (Schaffner: 200). In modern view, translation can be defined as a dual act of communication. It presupposes the existence, not of a single code, but of two distinct codes, the "source language" and the "target language". The fact that the two codes are not isomorphic creates obstacles for the translative operation. (Venuti: 337).

The fact that translation is the transfer of linguistic code shows the relationship between language and translation and explains why linguistic question are the starting point for all thinking about translation. But how culture has been merged into translation?

To answer this question, it is necessary to deal with the culture in translation and the emergence of the cultural turn.

### 3. Culture in Translation & Translation Studies

Throughout the centuries, translations have contributed to the processing and exchange of information both within and across cultural boundaries. Translating as an activity is as old as mankind. It had always had a place as a communicative medium, a language learning tool or a method of text access. It had long been the subject of philosophical and literary observation, and its strategies outlined and defended in reference to translated work. But the more systematic occupation with this phenomenon dealing with translation as an academic and scholarly endeavor is relatively new. Translation has traditionally been described as a comparative linguistic undertaking, whereby translation has been approached primarily from the perspective of the differences in language transfer. (Schaffner: 1). But this has turned out to be a narrow view. In the 80s, when translation studies began to emerge as a separate discipline, there was much shifting about and moving over of cultural and literary theories to make room for translated text, firstly as a cultural phenomenon and secondly as an integral part of any literary system. (Chantler: 17)

As Nida (1994) says: It's true that in all translating and interpreting, the source and target languages must be implicitly or explicitly compared, but all such interlingual communication extends far beyond the mechanics of linguistic similarities and contrasts. One of the main reasons for this is that the meaning of verbal symbols on any and every level depends on the culture of the language community. (Schaffner: 1). Recently, there fore the need for treating translation from a wide range of perspectives has been recognized. (e.g. Snell-Hornby, 1988). Translating and interpreting are essentially communicative processes that produce text. The important features of sociological setting have been included, and it has been recognized that a part from linguistics, insights from a number of specific disciplines for example: psychology, cultural anthropology, and communicative theory should be employed to explain the complex phenomenon of translation, and to show what happens in this complex process. Both source text and target text fulfill a specific function; play a specific role in their respective language communities and culture. (ibid).

Whit this regard, "Bassnett" and "Lefever" (1990) dismiss the kinds of linguistic theories of translation which have moved from word to text as unit, but not behind it, and do not consider the text in its cultural environment. They go behind language and focus on interaction between translation and culture. "Lambert" dismisses microstructures description and goes through the global structures. His descriptive studies in 1980s, made him aware of the cultural complexity implied within translation definition, and led him to emphasize on the necessity of systematic studies. (Gentzler, 1993:238). In his view, translation is a cross-cultural rather than inter-linguistic phenomenon. (ibid).

Mary Snell-Hornby, in the paper "*translation studies*" specifies the typology procedure of the text in which a text can only be recognized in its textual grid. (Gentzler: 234). The move from translation as text to translation as culture is what Snell-Hornby (1990), in her paper "*linguistic*



*encoding or cultural transfer*", terms the "cultural turn", which is taken up by "Bassnet" and "Lefever" as a metaphor for cultural movement. (Munday, 2001:127). Since the cultural turn is a significant turning point in translation studies, it is useful to elaborate on this notion.

### **3.1. The Emergence of the Cultural Turn**

"Bassnett" and "Lefever" (1990), in a collection of essays entitled *"translation, history and culture"*, drew attention to changes that underpin research in translation studies. Changes that signal a shift from a more formalist approach to greater emphasis on extra factors, and broader issues of context, history and convention, as well as ideology, ethics and culture. Both the limitation and prescriptivism of linguistic approaches prepared the ground for the emergence of cultural turn, so that translation studies inclined towards the shift of the frames of research and demanded the elaboration of every broad question. This enabled a thorough discussion of cultural perspective, contextual situations, and translation conventions, thus fore grounding the macro-context of translation, and different forms of representation. (Wolf, 2005). "Chantler" & "dente" (2009), assert that cultural turn of translation has shifted the focus of research from the linguistic mechanics of translating from one language into the other, to the translation as a communicative process, to the social role a translator plays and to the institution of translating supporting this role (12); moreover, the cultural turn has extended the very notion of translation to a whole range of mediating inter and intra cultural activities, beyond translation "proper", i.e., translation in the traditional narrow sense of word. (ibid).

"Lorna a Hardwick", the author of a book *"on intercultural translation"*, suggests that the act of translating involves translating into the receiving culture, the cultural framework within which a text is embedded. She also uses the organic metaphor of "transplantation" to refer to this action. (Bassnett, 1990).

In general, cultural turn was a massive intellectual phenomenon, and by no means only happening in translation studies. Across humanities, cultural questions were also assuming importance. (ibid). Regarding translation studies, "Bassnett" and "Lefever" were not the only translation scholars arguing the case for cultural turn. In Germany, Canada, Brazil, translation scholars set about the task of redefining the importance of translation in linguistic and literary history and explore the ideological implications of translation and power relations that are involved as a text is transferred from one context to another (Bassnett 1990:14); more over , the move to broaden the object of study beyond the immediate frame of the text and language had started long before, with the work of polysystem's group inspired by it mar Even-Zohar (1978), Gideon Toury (1978), which prepared the ground for the cultural turn, and were pioneers of this notion.

### **3.2. Itmar Even-Zohar & Gideon Toury (Polysystem Theory and Concept of Norms)**

Cultural theorist Itmar Even-Zohar revived essay on the position of translated literature within the literary polysystem identifies translated literature as a most active system within any literary polysystem a young, peripheral or weak literature or a literature in crisis will turn to translated literature as a source of innovation or renovation .one of his essay discusses "*cultural interference*", the influential effect upon each other of cultures in close proximity or with close contact. (Chantler: 18).

Even Zohar's (1978) proposition that cultures translate according to need, seems self-evident today, but in its time, it was an extremely important statement, for the implications of his theory of cultural change were enormous. (Bassnett: 17). A further example of the cultural turn in translation studies has been the expansion of research into norms governing translation strategies and techniques. Gideon Toury's work in progress the idea of "culture planning" in and through translation: the selective borrowing of high status text, what we could call classics, to be translated into minority languages for the purpose of building up and developing the culture into a stronger position vis a vis other cultures. (Chantler: 18). He is continuing and building on the polysystem work of Even-Zohar and on earlier versions of his own work. (Toury 1978, 1980, 1985, 1991). (Munday: 112). He emphasized a translations function within the target culture and strongly drew on the concept of translation norms that govern relation between source and target text. A detailed analysis of all translation norms effective at a specific time within a specific society would ideally enable insights into that society's ideas on translation as a cultural phenomenon. (Wolf: 8). Due to the importance of culture in translation studies and as a further instances some significant cultural studies have been elaborated as follows.

## **4. Cultural Studies**

### **4.1. Andre Lefever (the Notion of Rewriting)**

Against the background of the "cultural turn" in translation studies (which has been described early in the article), "Andre Lefever" developed the premise that each translation comes with its own purpose, patronage, ideology and capacity for manipulation. Every translation is, in fact a rewriting of the original source text, whatever the original is perceived to be. (Chantler: 19). "Rewriters", Lefever tells us, adapt, manipulate the original they work with to some extent, usually to make them fit in with the dominant, or one of the dominant ideological or cultural currents of their time. He defines culture "as the environment of a system" this is to see translation as a kind of literary appropriation and implies that even the selection of the text to translate from the library of available classics may have some political, literary or cultural implication for the target culture, which of course it did in many of the cases mentioned earlier. (Chantler, *ibid*).

In particular, the notion of rewriting is one that denotes both the manipulative intervention on the level of the text and the cultural devices which direct and control the production procedure in the interplay of social forces. (Wolf: 10), for "Lefever", the most important consideration, is

the ideological one, and the view of translation as a social and cultural practice is central to his work. (Munday: 130). In viewing translation as a cultural practice "Benjamin" as assists that translation of the text are used to enhance the status of a culture when its own resources are stretched but they also rejuvenate and re – engage the activity necessary for the culture to generate material of its own. Translations can also be manipulated and shaped to fit the target cultures ideology, or written to emphasize a different aspect of their content. (Chantler: 19). In general, cultural studies in translation has inevitably taken translation studies away from purely linguistic analysis and brought it into contact with other disciplines, among them gender and postcolonial translation theory are significant to notice.

#### **4.2. Gender & Postcolonial Translation Theory**

Sherry Simon criticizes translation studies for often using the term "culture" as if it referred to an obvious and unproblematic reality. (Munday: 131). She approaches translation from a gender studies angle. She sees language of sexism in translation studies, with its images of dominance, fidelity, faith fullness and betrayal. Feminist theorists see a parallel between the status of translation, which is considered to be derivative and inferior to the original writing, and that of women, so often represented in society and literature. This is the core of feminist translation theory which seeks to identify and critique the tangle of concept which relegates both women and translation to the bottom of the social, cultural and literary ladder. (ibid). Simon thus links gender and cultural studies to the development in post colonialism. (Munday: 133).

Postcolonial translation theory is yet another example of how research in the field of translation has developed in parallel with research in literary, cultural and historical studies more generally. (Bassnett: 20)

Simon draws together issues of gender and post colonialism as seen in the work of Spivak. In particular, Simon highlights spivak's concerns about the ideological consequences of the translation of third world literature into English. (Munday: 133).

Spivak has addressed these questions in her seminal essay "*the politics of translation*" (1993/2000), brings together feminist, post colonialist and post structuralist approaches. tensions between the different approaches are high lighted, with Spivak speaking out against western feminists who expect feminist writing from outside Europe to be translated into the language of power, English in Spivak's view, such translation in often expressed in translationese, which dominates the identity of politically less powerful individuals and cultures. (Munday, ibid). Spivak's work is indicative of how cultural studies and especially post-colonialism, has focused on the issues of translation, the translational and colonization .the linking of colonization and translation is accompanied the argument that translation has played an active role in the colonization process and in disseminating an ideologically motivated image of colonized people. (Munday: 134).

The central intersection of translation studies and postcolonial theory is that of power relation, introduced by Niranjana (1992). She sees literary translation as one of the discourses which

inform the hegemonic apparatuses that belong to the ideological and cultural structure of colonized rule. (Munday, *ibid*). She looks at translation as an act of appropriation, and argues that translation is an activity that participates in the fixing of colonized culture into a mould fashion by superior power. She also focuses attention on the inequality between literary and cultural systems, which sometimes transforms the activity of translation into an aggressive act. (Bassnett: 20).

## **5. Further Remarks & Conclusion**

Back to the above –mentioned subjects, it can be notified that the discussion on translation activities has been changed. This changing can be described in a way that translation is no longer a linguistic, but rather a cultural phenomenon. This discussion goes far beyond the linguistic form so that many scholars can even equate translation with culture, for culture creates social structures and is shaped by existing ones, and in these construction processes, translation undoubtedly plays a major role. (Wolf: 5). This shows the importance and interrelation of culture and ideology and its intervention with translation issues, and especially reveals the fact that translation cannot be conducted at a purely linguistic level, but must incorporate cultural and contextual factors too. (Cook: 55). It is evident that successful interpretation of language in context depends upon the degree to which the participants share conventions and ideologies, (Cook: 52) and with regard to translation as a cross-cultural communication, this factor (especially differences not similarities), should be taken into account. As with languages, there is disagreement over the degree to which cultures reflect universal human attribute; however, it would be wrong to regard culture as either static or bounded, and it is over simplification to equate culture with nationality. (Cook: 55).

Finally, it would be an oversimplified view to say that translation is primarily about language, not culture. Focusing on language as a primal means for transferring a text from one language to another is evident, but not as the only means. Language can't be separated from culture, imbedded in culture, reflects culture, provides access to culture, and in many respects constitutes a model of the culture. (Schaffner: 1). Linguistic acts take place in a context and text are created in a continuum not in a vacuum. Translation is about language, but translation is also about culture, for the two are inseparable. Translation is implicit in the processes of cultural transformation and change (Bassnett: 23). So, the interlingual translation has become a metaphor for the whole range of social activities and process of mediation, from the hermeneutics of understanding and interpretation to personal, cultural and intercultural dialogical engagements and on to exchanges of material and cultural capital. (Chantler: 13).

All in all, understanding more about the textual transfer, not only requires understanding of language, but also the changing patterns of cultural interaction in the world one inhabits.



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