TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL TERMS

A Motive or a Hinder-

Dr.SEKKAL (Babou) Meryem

University of Saida

Abstract

The current era is characterized by intercultural communication and contacts. This phenomenon has become more common than it used to be in the past and this is due to globalization and modern technology. Hence, to achieve a successful communication with strangers especially those whom we do not share the same language we should be able to grasp the true meaning of what they say. Moreover, knowing and using the foreign language is not enough to capture the sense of what is said. Consequently, individuals should consider even the culture of that foreign language so as to be able to unravel the meaning of cultural bound terms through an appropriate translation. Thus, the coupling of both language and culture is also required in the process of translating. For this reason, the present research has taken into account the major methods and strategies of translation that leads to understandable outcomes.

Key Words: Culture, Language, Translation, strategies.

ملخص:

يتميز العصر الحالي بالاتصالات و المعاملات بين الثقافات. وقد أصبحت هذه الظاهرة أكثر شيوعا مما كانت عليه في الماضي، ويرجع ذلك إلى العولمة والتكنولوجيا الحديثة. وبالتالي، لتحقيق التواصل الناجح مع الغرباء وخاصة أولئك الذين لا نشارك معهم نفس اللغة يجب أن نكون قادرين على فهم المعنى الحقيقي لما يقولونه. وعلاوة على ذلك، معرفة واستخدام اللغة الأجنبية ليست كافية لفهم المعنى الحقيقي لما يقال. وبالتالي، ينبغي للأفراد النظر حتى في ثقافة تلك اللغة الأجنبية حتى يستطيع كشف معنى المصطلحات الثقافية من خلال الترجمة المناسبة. وبالتالي، هناك أيضا حاجة إلى اقتران اللغة والثقافة في عملية الترجمة. ولهذا السبب، تطرأنا في هذا البحث الى الأساليب والاستراتيجيات الرئيسية المتبعة في الترجمة والتي تؤدي إلى نتائج مفهومة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الثقافة، اللغة، الترجمة، الاستراتيجيات

1- Introduction

Undoubtedly, exploring the universe of translation opens new windows to approach language and culture. Arguably, dealing with different linguistic features when translating sounds is easier and less problematic, however the non-linguistic aspects especially the real meaning of the word are hard to detect and to deal with if the transfer is word by word. Translation and culture are so intertwined that translators can no longer ignore cultural elements in a given speech either written or spoken. As a matter of fact, it is important to know and clarify what culture represents in the community where it is held. This attitude cooperates in the establishment and then avoidance of the problems raised when translating and passing it to another speech community. De facto, every language has its particular ways of expressions which per se may influence the way of perceiving the real world. Certainly, when we start translating we will find and discover new and unique items concerning the others that are completely distinct from the milieu where we live. Translation is deemed as an essential component in order to facilitate communication with people from other countries. Nonetheless, for the sake of achieving a successful communication we need to transmit the real meaning of the words and utterances in addition to the linguistic items which will seem meaningless to the interlocutor. Therefore, we have taken into consideration various ways offered by translation scholars where problems of translating can be solved so that the receiving audience may perceive the culture and the otherness of different communities.

Nevertheless, we cannot deny that some important features may be lost in the source culture when converting it into the target one. This latter leads us to use the equivalence methods of translation, according to the functionalist theories. Henceforth and based on what has been previously stated, the following research questions are raised:

1- Which techniques are appropriate and successful to treat the cultural aspects in both languages and cultures?
2- How can translators face these permanent issues and how can they convey and transfer these aspects for the audience?

This paper will be an attempt to tackle the issue of the possibility or impossibility of culture translation, by presenting some of the most popular theories related to the culture-bound terms and their equivalents within an Algerian context.

2- Language and Culture

Researchers from a wide variety of backgrounds have been interested in the nature of the relationship between language and culture. Consequently, we shall look at some ways in which language and culture are said to be linked. It is generally agreed that language and culture are closely related. Culture refers to ideas and beliefs which are interpreted by people's language that is used as a medium of communication. So, it is obvious that our thinking is influenced by the language we use. Brown H. D describes the two as follows: "a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture"[1].

2-1- Culture

The term culture is used differently by cultural anthropology and linguistics. The former is interested only in the artefacts of a community, such as its music, theatre, clothing, whereas the latter relates to learning and knowledge. Goodenough considers culture as a socially acquired knowledge and to better understand his idea, it is worth quoting him at length. Goodenough W.H. says:

> As I see it, a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for anyone of themselves. Culture, being what people have to learn as distinct from their biological heritage, must consist of the end-product of learning: knowledge in a most general…sense of the term.[2]

As the quotation clearly demonstrates, culture involves all the essential elements related to knowledge of beliefs, traditions and mode of life so as to be able to behave in a good manner in a given speech community. In the same line of thought, Goodenough adds that "the necessary behaviours and beliefs that are learned do not come from any kind of genetic endowment"[3]. As a matter of fact, we acquire them from people who surround us, either directly when we follow their instructions or only by watching their behaviour.

Culture, also refers to intellectual and creative products, it also includes beliefs, practices, traditions and the religion of a society. A widely used definition adopted at the World Conference on Cultural Policies (Mexico1982) is as follows:

> Culture …is…the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.[1]

Furthermore, culture according to Richard A. Hudson is the "know how" and "know what"[4]. In other terms, a person must possess norms of life from his society in order to get through the task of daily living. In brief, this kind of knowledge plays an influential role when we communicate with other people, particularly when we use language, the verbal expression of culture.

2.2- Language

Language on the other hand is the principal instrument by which we conduct our social lives. Quoted in John Lyons, Sapir (1921) defines it "as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntary produced symbols"[5]. Actually, the process of speaking refers to the

[1] - www.unesco.org/culture/laws/mexico/html_eng/page1.htm;29.11.2011

ways people manage to establish and maintain their relationships as it reflects their ways of conceiving the world where they live. Similarly, Hall (1964) considers language "as a purely human institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral auditory symbols"[6] (quoted in Lyons). The term institution here implies that the language spoken in any society is part of its culture, since using language permits us to identify ourselves as it gives clues and information about our origin and the sort of person we are. Additionally, it becomes easier for the others to locate our place of living thanks to our language.

In point of fact, each member is inspired from the conviction and practices that pervade a given speech community. Alessandro Duranti (1997) contends that "words carry in them a myriad possibilities for connecting us to other human beings, other situations, events, acts, beliefs, feelings… The indexicality of language is thus part of the constitution of any act of speaking as an act of participation in a community of language users"[7]. Thus, from this, we can construe that a variety of messages is transmitted through language which is not merely a means of exchanging information, but also the best way to make and maintain relationships.

Culture and language are thus linked since culture activities are generally carried out through the use of language. In other words, culture includes ideas, customs and beliefs of a community which go along the population's language, whereas language serves as a medium of communication and interprets everything a speaker can

think about and even his way of thinking. On this wise, it would be logical to support the idea that people speak differently because they think differently. So, language offers them many ways to view the world where they live.

3- The Importance of the Local Culture in Translation

In a globalized world, translation has become a vital activity in people's daily life. Translation is needed for the extension of interactive relationships in various domains such as education, tourism, economics, technology, intercultural communication and so forth. Literally, the role of the translator/interlocutor is to succeed in transmitting the real meaning of the word or the phrase. To achieve this, he should involve the implicit cultural aspects and the linguistic barriers of the source text in order to achieve the adequate equivalent in the target language. Nida E.A. argues that "differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure"[8]. Accordingly, both language and culture discrepancies are necessary in translating from source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Bassnett S. adds that, "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"[9]. This means that, if the translator doesn't treat the source culture and language correctly, he may definitely fail in his translating task. Moreover, translation can be considered as a vital tool in transmitting cultures. This fact puts the translators in front of a big challenge where they are expected to translate the source language text in a way that

suits the cultural situation of both the target language and culture. In other words, the translation process should comply with what is common and conventional in the community.

Factually, as far as the word translation is coincided, the idea of the existence of two languages side to side comes to mind. Besides, these two languages belong to specific cultures which should be taken into consideration for the sake of achieving a good and a firm understanding of the speech of the translator or the interlocutor. In this respect, Toury G. says that “translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions"[10]. One should bear in mind that, the process of translation is effort and time consuming because the researcher is to have a global knowledge about the cultures of the languages used in translations. He is also supposed not to confuse the readers or the listeners who are expecting a reliable and applicable translation.

4-Translations Procedures

As previously mentioned, language and culture are entwined and if they are separated they will lose their significance. Absolutely, any language is characterized by its cultural specific items (CSIs) that are difficult to identify. In this respect, Nida E.A contends that "differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure"[11]. By the same token, Newmark P. asserts that “translation problems caused by culture-specific words arise due to the fact that they are intrinsically

and uniquely bound to the culture concerned and, therefore, are related to the 'context of a cultural tradition"[12]. In other terms, CSIs symbolizes each culture apart since they may not exist in the target language. They should also be treated delicately in order to discard the intercultural gap between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). Thus, the researcher should consider the main methods and strategies of translation for the sake of giving a conceivable and coherent translation for the original text. Translation, however, has been the concern of different theorists who have offered various procedures of translating culture-specific concepts. Newmark P, for instance, has set up an inductive discrepancy between translation methods and translation procedures as he contends that "while translation methods relate to whole texts, translation procedures are used for sentences and the smaller units of language"[13]. Mayoral et al. describe the translator as "a receptor of the message within the source culture as well as a source of the message in the target culture"[14].

Henceforth, since the research at hand is concerned with translation of cultural terms more specifically Algerian idioms and proverbs, we find it suitable to utilize translation procedures rather than translation methods. A.L. Graedler puts forth some procedures of translating culture specific concepts (CSCs)[15]:

1. Making up a new word.
2. Explaining the meaning of the SL expression in lieu of translating it.
3. Preserving the SL term intact.

4. Opting for a word in the TL which seems similar to or has the same "relevance" as the SL term.

Consequently, the translator should be acquainted with basic culture-bound terms (CBT's) to be able to give a pertinent translation for the TL text. Harvey M. defines (CBT's) as follows: "refer to concepts, institutions and personnel which are specific to the SL culture"[16]. Pursuing this further, Harvey also suggested the following four main techniques to translate (CBT's)[17]:

1-Functional Equivalence: It means using a referent in the TL culture whose function is similar to that of the source language (SL) referent.

2-Formal Equivalence or 'linguistic equivalence': It means a 'word-for-word' translation.

3-Transcription or 'borrowing' (i.e. reproducing or, where necessary, transliterating the original term): It stands at the far end of SL-oriented strategies. If the term is formally transparent or is explained in the context, it may be used alone. In other cases, particularly where no knowledge of the SL by the reader is presumed, transcription is accompanied by an explanation or a translator's note.

4-Descriptive or self-explanatory translation: It uses generic terms (not CBTs) to convey the meaning. It is appropriate in a wide variety of contexts where formal equivalence is considered insufficiently clear. In a text aimed at a specialized reader, it can be helpful to add the original SL term to avoid ambiguity.

Respectively, functional equivalence is a method that seeks the referent (synonym or meaning) in the TL culture which has the same function as the one in the SL. Formal Equivalence or 'linguistic

equivalence' merely refers to 'word-for-word' translation. Transcription or 'borrowing' (i.e. reproducing or, where necessary, transliterating the original term) is used when the word is transparent or when its meaning is guessed through its context of use. Descriptive or self-explanatory translation uses common terms instead of (CBTs) to explain or clarify the sense of the TL term. This technique suits many situations since formal equivalence cannot provide the translator with a satisfactory explanation.

5- Methodology of the Study

Idioms are part and parcel of everyday language use, so they can be detected and collected easily (at university yard, spontaneous conversations, buses and so on). For this reason, we have first employed the tool of participant observation in order to gather the commonly used expressions and idioms. Second, we have employed a test of translation given to master two students at the university of Saida where they were asked to translate some collected expressions. These two tools have been used for the sake of achieving answers to our research questions.

The collected data is analyzed qualitatively and is accompanied by some explanatory statements. Actually, the qualitative analysis of the results is difficult to conduct and to organize because it is not restricted into fixed numbers and statistics. Hence, if the researcher will not control it, the obtained results will be confusing to the reader. Moreover, the researcher is supposed to be objective for the sake of making the qualitative data sound more empirical and scientific. He

should also clarify the phenomenon under investigation and should consider even futile matters so as to avoid to be deluded by the participant's answers.

5-1- Material

The material used in this research represents a big slice of any culture i.e. colloquial idiomatic expressions. The latter may reflect and provide important information about not only the type of language or expressions that are daily used in the Algerian context but also about the way Algerians communicate with each other and the kind of relationships that ties them. In fact, the Algerian speech especially the one of the youth is full of idioms and ambiguous expressions that seem at the beginning strange and are not easily accepted especially by parents. Indeed, idiomatic expressions have metaphorical characteristics as they need almost the time to be unraveled or decoded. Consequently, they require a profound recognition and understanding about the language and the culture that they belong to in order to decipher and translate them. Healey A. defined an idiom as "any group of words whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meaning of the individual words"[18]. Langlotz A. contends that "idiomatic constructions can be described as complex symbols with specific formal, semantic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic characteristics"[19]. Correspondingly, in order to deal with idioms one should couple several disciplines such as language and culture, language and semantics in addition to language and pragmatics. Therefore, idioms can be an appropriate source of investigating people's belonging, ethnicity and traditions.

5-2 Analysis of the Data

5-2-1- Participant Observation

The investigative tool of participant observation has been introduced in the research at hand in order to attain naturalistic data about the Algerian speech. The main purpose of this tool is to observe the way Algerian people use idiomatic expressions and try to pick them in order to translate and analyze them. The observed situations include dissimilar categories of people i.e. different age, sex in addition to different settings and ethnic groups. So, countless language usages have been captured from which several idioms have been filtrated. The idioms are as follows:

1- [dawerha alih ghobra/ دورها عليه غربا]: is a common expression that is found in the Algerian society to mean that the person has betrayed his friend or has merely changed over him.
2- [aayit nenjar fih w mant'jerrchعييت ننجر فيه و ما نتجرش/]: means that I have tried many times with him/her but it does work.
3- [nadrab aalih table /نضرب عليه الطابلة]: stands for 'I will defend him'
4- [tmecha maaya f khat /تمشى معايا في الخط]: means to be complicit to accomplish an act.
5- [ard ard /أرض أرض]/ or ' [سكيمي] to do something in secret.
6- [ليه ليه]means rapidly e.g. [جيت نشوفك ليه ليه 'I have come to see you rapidly'
7- '[laab khfif/ لعب خفيف]: also means 'move speedily'

8- [yedrab echita /يضرب الشيتة]: means he does everything to people sometimes even mean acts in order to get what he wants

9- ’ [haya madayrach/ حاجة مدايراش]: implies something amazing

10- [li b’gha ymout ykessel rejlih/لي بغا يموت بكسل رجليه]: signifies that I don’t care.

11- [neyelha w tafi do/نيلها و طفي الضو]: is used when somebody does a mistake or something wrong and asks the witness to not tell anything.

12- ’ [twalo rejlik/طوالو رجليك]: is used when somebody is found or goes to a place that he is not used to go to it.

13- [champ rah tayerli/شان راه طايرلي] : signifies that someone is not well at all or that he has some troubles that make him feel angry and irritated.

5-2-2 Translation Test

Translation test is the second method that is used in this survey and is adapted according to the needs of the study. Put it differently, the test was given to master two students (five students) who were asked to translate some idioms from colloquial Arabic into English. As previously mentioned, there exist several strategies and techniques of translation cultural bound terms. Our sample population shares the same country, language and culture. However, in translating we have found some discrepancies that need to be analyzed.

1- [laab khfif/لعب خفيف]:

S1- play rapidly

S2- hurry up

S3- be rapid

S4- activate as the word exist in French so he uses it as an equivalent in English

S5- do it quickly

2- **’** [aayit nenjar fih w mant’jerrch عييت ننجر فيه و ما تنجرش]:

S1- it was tiring to attempt with him

S2- In vain

S3- ~~0~~

S4- useless

S5- I have tried many times.

3- **’** [li b’gha ymout ykessel rejlihلي بغا يموت يكسل رجليه]:

S1- the one who wants to die can stretch his legs

S2- ~~0~~

S3- I really don’t care about you

S4- go to hell

S5- I will do what I find it suitable

The above idioms have been translated by students and each one gives a particular translation which he finds that it serves the purpose. The translations have been approximative since the students belong to the same society as they share the same culture. Yet, any stranger who knows or even masters the Arabic language is unable to achieve the ‘correct’ translation because these are typical cultural bound terms. Indeed, if the stranger will translate them following word for word technique the results will the followings:

- [لعب خفيف] : ‘play rapidly’ is also suggested by S1 and if this translation is considered, the expression will lose its true meaning which is ‘be quick in doing something’ and has not to do with playing.
- [عييت ننجر فيه و ما تنجرش] : ‘It was tiring to carve him and he has not been carved’ the expression is said when you try to better the situation of somebody or to show him how to conduct prestigiously but all the efforts done are ineffectual.
- [لي بغا يموت يكسل رجليه] : ‘the one who wants to die can elongate his leg’. The idiom stands for the showing ignorance and indifference about the others especially after deciding to do something which will not be accepted by them.

In fact, the tools of investigation that are employed in this research paper i.e. participant observation and the translation test have paved the way to know or at least to be aware about the main idioms used by Algerians in their daily speech. Further, they also permit us to be acquainted either with their true or approximate meaning in addition to their purpose of use. However, we should also emphasize on the purpose of the paper itself .i.e. which method can offer an adequate translation and transference of meaning? Several methods and techniques can be followed and initiated in the field of translation. Yet, it is the role of the researcher to decide the one that suits his needs and quench his thirst. For instance, when we have translated the proverbs collected through the tool of participant observation, we have relied on utilizing translation procedures which are proposed by

Gradler. Moreover, the translations of the collected idioms that are proposed by the informants indicate that they are familiar with them. Actually, the above idioms are part and parcel of the Algerian culture. So, it is discernible that the participants have relied on Harvey's techniques of translating (CBT's) in order to succeed in giving useful and clear translations. Additionally, we cannot deny the facilitator fact which is their belonging to the culture of those expressions and their awareness that word for word translation cannot serve their aims.

6- Conclusion

Translation is among the important means that facilitate communication and expands acquaintances especially in this current globalized world. Its significance has led researcher to look for techniques and procedures which facilitate the task of translating and provide us with profound and explanations i.e. taking into about the cultural context. As a matter of fact, a huge number of techniques can be found to the extent of being sometimes confused. So, any researcher should select the ones that he thinks may help him to narrow the scope of research and to transmit the message to the reader. As far as the study is concerned, translation of cultural bound terms requires a deep knowledge and familiarity with the culture of the expressions. The results shows that the participants are convinced that if idioms are deprived form cultural aspects and are translated literally, the results will be ambiguous for the addressees and in many times they will lost their real sense.

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