

Translation Process in Rendering Source Language Spoken Words or Phrases to Target Language Items: Semantic or Communicative Approach

Ali Eskandari

*English Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages
University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
Email: alieskandari86@yahoo.com*

Ehsan Panahbar

*English Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages
University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran*

Doi: 10.5901/mjss.2012.03.01.169

Abstract *This paper discusses the translation of spoken words and phrases from English to Persian. Verbal communication is one of the aspects of culture, translation of which really matters in intercultural studies. So, in order to evaluate the efficacy of this transfer from source language to target language, we take Newmark's communicative and semantic approach. To conduct this research, 10 MA students of translation studies are picked and asked to translate 25 sentences each of which contains spoken words or phrases. Based on Newmark, sentences should be rendered into target language communicatively and participants rendered only 31% of the items communicatively.*

Keywords: *degrees of difficulty, grammatical ambiguity, lexical ambiguity, communicative translation, semantic translation*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, in our world of international communication, there are different elements which are transferred between societies, one of which is culture. According to Longman dictionary of Contemporary English, culture means 'the beliefs, way of life, art, and customs that are shared and accepted by people in a particular society'. We can consider language as one aspect of culture too. This means that a language is cast in the culture of a society. It is heavily influenced and takes shape by customs, beliefs and lifestyle of a given society. As Cote puts it: "language determines the way a person views the world (1998, p.21). Regarding this fact, there is no doubt that there are lexical items, idioms and expressions that have been made up according to each society culture and social values. This point was covered in some articles.

Just to provide some examples, Park tries to consider the problem of metaphor in literary translations into Korean. He believes that the translator should do his best to retain the metaphor in target text as well, contending it is not always possible to render it as much identical to the original one, though. He suggests that in these cases, where semantic translation is in vain, the translator ought to be after equivalence (2009, p.155). In another study, Davies deals with the various translations of culture-specific items in J. K. Rowling *Harry Potter* books. In this research, the researcher tries to single out translation strategies adopted by the translators and efficacy of them. She suggests that it will be more viable if we take into consideration these culture-specific items in whole rather than covering them one by one; the approach that in her opinion will contribute to the development of the whole text (2003, p.65). Fernandes takes the translation of names in children's fantasy literature as his research topic. In this research, he, at first, provides a definition for names, aiming to clarify the meaning each name conveys. And finally he proposes ten translation strategies in the process of rendering names from source language to target language (2006, p.44).

As we know, translation is a process of decoding and encoding. It means that the translator is obliged to provide a crystal clear translation for target language readers, for whom the meaning of original is opaque.

In other words, he is supposed to have a good command of source language and target language to be able to decode the source text and encode it in the new system, target language. But this ambiguity in the composition of translated text cannot be accounted in terms of readers' background knowledge; rather it is justifiable in terms of the translators' command of both source and target language. Newmark also believes that one of the difficulties a translator has to weather with is the concept of ambiguity.

1.1 Ambiguity

Newmark defines ambiguity as 'a stretch of SL text, normally word or syntactic structure, having apparently more than one meaning.' (1988, pp. 218,219) According to his definition, there are seven kinds of ambiguity:

- **Grammatical ambiguity.** When the style or manner of composition of a text is not well-formed, it causes syntactic ambiguity, which is quite common in English too. According to Newmark, it is possible to clarify a text, if the context is informative.
- **Lexical ambiguity** Because of the nature of language, especially English, one word can denote to one or more meanings, depending on its context. And this point makes the act of translation much more arduous.
- **Pragmatic ambiguity** As Newmark (1988:219) puts it: pragmatic ambiguity arises when the tone or the emphasis in an SL sentence is not clear'. And it surfaces most of the time in written texts, because of the lack of immediate and instant clarification.
- **Cultural ambiguity** It refers to cases where a cultural feature does not hold water anymore and assumes a new function.
- **Idiomatic ambiguity** It points out this fact that the word or expression a person use with a particular meaning, is based on his own interpretation or the way he perceives that very word, not its dictionary meaning.
- **Referential meaning** It surfaces in cases that use of a word makes us to come up with two or more meanings, like "spring" which simultaneously prompts more than one meaning. In such cases, we have to look back the text to figure out the main sense.
- **Metaphorical meaning** And finally, this refers to metaphorical expressions, conjuring up different images in reader's mind. Newmark puts forth that in translating them, it is preferable to render the 'most probable sense'.

1.2 Degrees of Difficulty

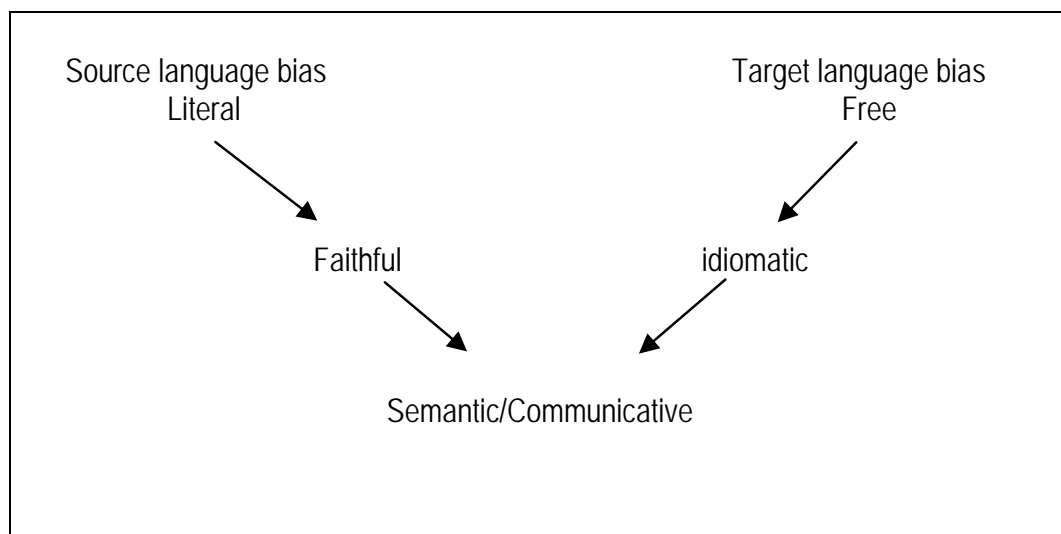
Another aspect we should focus on, is determining aspects of difficulty. By aspect of difficulty, we mean which dimension of language impedes the process of rendering between source language and target language. According to Newmark 'the chief difficulties in translating are lexical, not grammatical, i.e. words, collocations and fixed phrases or idioms' (1988, p.32). Accordingly he believes that "difficulties are of two kinds: a) you don't understand them; b) you find them hard to translate". If you can't understand a word, it may be because all possible meanings are not known to you, or because its meaning is determined by its unusual collocation or a reference elsewhere in the text (Newmark 1988, p.33). So we should keep a watchful eye, try to find out what causes the translator to have difficulty translating lexical items. In other word, we should be after elements, somehow impeding the process of transfer. ZiaHossieni believes that there are five of them and calls them degrees of difficulty. These degrees of difficulty are:

- **Transfer** It is about sounds, lexical items or structures that are similar in the two languages.
- **Coalescence** It happens when two or more items in the native language converge into one item in target language.
- **Underdifferentiation** It points out that the equivalence of an item in the native language is absent in the foreign language.

- **Reinterpretation** It refers to the cases where an item exists in both native and target languages and learners would overgeneralize it.
- **Overdifferentiation** ZiaHosseini believes this happen 'when an item in the foreign language is absent in the native language'.
- **Split** It pops up when an item in the native language diverges into two or more items in the target language. (Ziahosseini, 1999, pp.14, 15).

Regarding aforementioned points about ambiguity and degrees of difficulty, this research tries to find out the translation strategies, each translator takes use of. This research chooses spoken words or phrases as its research topic and keeps a watchful eye on the process of rendering. Although a lot of topics have been chosen and consequently been explored and scrutinized, as far as the researchers knows, spoken words or phrases which falls within the realm of communication has not been taken care of. The researcher believes that spoken words and phrases in English carry meaning much more than they do in Persian. Beside that fact, there are cases that some of them have no equivalence in Persian, as well. It seems that there are no crystal-clear spoken words and phrases in Persian that would suit their corresponding items in English. So in spite of this difficulty, there are strategies we can take as our touchstone in evaluating the quality of translations made. In so doing, we can use Newmark semantic and communicative approach. Newmark believes that 'communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of original and semantic translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original'(1988, p.39).

Figure1. Schematic representation of semantic and communicative translations



2. Methodology

In order to do this research, 10 MA students in translation studies at Isfahan University were picked. These participants have passed specialized courses in translation including literary translation, economic and political translation and interpretations. So they are considered qualified and eligible to conduct this research on. After picking them, about 25 sentences handed over to them and they were asked to translate them. The sentences comprise highlighted words or phrases all of which are being used in verbal communication. They were allowed to use dictionaries and World Wide Web to figure out what each word or phrase means. Regarding the fact that none of these words are translated and provided in English-Persian dictionaries, they were obliged to render them in their own term.

3. Results

After collecting the data, spoken words and phrases were examined and analyzed. By doing so, at first we intended to know that whether they have a good command of source language and if they do, whether they can render it appropriately into Persian. After evaluating their capabilities in understanding source language and target language, it was time to take a thorough look at the way they translated the highlighted items. After setting Newmark's model of semantic and communicative rendering as the touchstone, so the researcher went through each sentence one by one to identify the strategies used. The following tables show the data related to our aim. The items included in the first table are translated sentences, mistranslated items and not translated ones. According to the data, participants translated 63.2% of the items correctly; about 30.8% of items were mistranslated and about 6% were not translated at all. The second table is about communicative and semantic items being translated in the text. Surprisingly participants translated 31.6% of the items semantically and about the same percent communicatively.

Table1. Total frequency of items translated

participantes' response items No	Translated items	Mistranslated items	Not translated items	
1	9	1	—	
2	5	5	—	
3	8	2	—	
4	4	4	2	
5	4	5	1	
6	3	7	—	
7	8	2	—	
8	4	3	3	
9	9	1	—	
10	8	1	1	
11	8	2	—	
12	10	—	—	
13	9	1	—	
14	8	2	—	
15	3	6	1	
16	3	7	—	
17	8	2	—	
18	7	3	—	
19	10	—	—	
20	5	5	—	
21	5	4	1	
22	5	3	2	
23	8	1	1	
24	3	5	2	
25	4	5	1	
Total frequencies	158	77	15	250
Percentage	63.2%	30.8%	6%	100%

Table2. Total frequency and percentage of communicative and semantic translation strategies

participantes' strategies / items No	Communicative strategy	Semantic strategy	Mistranslated items	Not translated items	
1	6	3	1	—	
2	4	1	5	—	
3	8	—	2	—	
4	2	2	4	2	
5	4	—	5	1	
6	2	1	7	—	
7	—	8	2	—	
8	3	1	3	3	
9	2	7	1	—	
10	6	2	1	1	
11	4	4	2	—	
12	6	4	—	—	
13	2	7	1	—	
14	1	7	2	—	
15	2	1	6	1	
16	1	2	7	—	
17	—	8	2	—	
18	—	7	3	—	
19	8	2	—	—	
20	3	2	5	—	
21	4	1	4	1	
22	4	1	3	2	
23	1	7	1	1	
24	3	—	5	2	
25	3	1	5	1	
Total frequencies	79	79	77	15	250
Percentage	31.6%	31.6%	30.8%	6%	100%

4. Discussion

As the tables show, the results are surprising. This study was conducted on MA students of translation studies and most of them have got BA in translation too. So it would be reasonable to look forward to a better performance. By looking at the percentage of mistranslated items and those ones which are not translated, it is obvious that as much as the other two categories, semantic and communicative translation, there are sentences the participants were ignorant of, being unable to understand sentences appropriately to render them into Persian acceptably.

Another aspect, we should cast a look upon, is the aim this research was after. As it was said in advance, translation of spoken words and phrases is the primary end of this paper. Needless to say that verbal communication also mirrors the culture of a language too. Bearing that in mind, Newmark also mentions that 'semantic translation remains within the original culture and assists the reader only in its connotations and communicative translation addresses itself solely to the second reader, who does not anticipate difficulties or obscurities' (1988, p.39), in other words he prefers to have an easily graspable

stretches of word in his own language and in our case an easily comprehensible verbal communication. The very task that seems the participants did not succeed in achieving it. In the following lines some examples will be provided which show in what cases the participants managed to translate communicatively and in what other cases they failed to do so.

The first ones we are going to consider are these two which most of the participants neither translated them nor translated them appropriately.

- (a) *There is intelligence for you! She solved the problem already.*
 (b) *Well, there is gratitude for you. She didn't even say thank you.*

For (b), one of participants used "{khob}خوب meaning 'well' " which is completely irrelevant, and another one used this "{inam ghadrdani}اینم قدردانی" literally means 'here is for gratitude' which is really opaque. But some other translated them very well, like this translation which stands for (a), "{inghad bahooshe ke moshkel ra kheili zod hal mikone. Yad begir!}اینقد باهوشه که مشکل رو خیلی زود حل کرد. یاد بگیر!" which literally means ' he is so smart that solve that problem quickly. Learn from her' . This translation really stands out vis-à-vis other ones provided for (a). In another case, the performance of one of participant was really disastrous. This participant translated 15 sentences out of 25 wrong, here are some his.

- (c) *There! I've done that. I've resigned.*

"اونجا. تمام شد. استعفا دادم." { Onja. Tamam shod. Estefa dadam.}

The Persian rendering literally means 'there, it just finished. I resigned'.

- (d) *There, there, don't get so upset.*

"اونجا اونجا نکن و اینقدر هم دلتنگی نکن." {Onja, onja nakon va inghadr ham deltangi nakon}

Its Persian rendering literally means, 'Don't say there and stop missing him'.

- (e) *There she goes again, complaining about the weather.*

"باز رفته اونجا و از آب و هوا شکایت کرده است." {Baz rafte onja va az ab va hava shekayat karde ast.}

Persian rendering of this one literally means 'she has gone there to complain about the weather'. Interestingly, for (d) a participant provided this: "باشه، باشه، اینقدر ناراحت نشو" {Bashe, bashe, inghadr narahat nasho}, which means 'Ok, fine, don't get so upset'. This sentence, based on Longman definition, communicatively suits the English phrase. Another participant chose the Persian equivalence of shush and wrote in the answer sheet {shush} 'شششش'.

Astonishingly, while analyzing the data, I came across an answer sheet in which seven out of twenty-five sentences have been left out unanswered. The very participant mistranslated four other. Apparently, the participants did not have a very good command of English. And finally there is one more item for which participants provided really odd translation, without even knowing what that sentence means. Here is the example: *Don't come the poor struggling artist with me. You're just lazy.* While Longman dictionary defines it as: 'used to tell someone not to pretend that they are something they are not in order to get sympathy', some participants chose these sentences to stand for that

{ Ey honarmande faghire badbakht, ba man naya} "ای هنرمند فقیر بدبخت، با من نیا" which literally means ' you are such a poor and miserable artist, stop following me', and the other one is " اینطور نیست که از پس کار نتوانی " {intor nist ke az pase kar natoni bar biai, faghat tanbali}, which literally means ' Of course, you can handle this problem, you are just lazy'.

5. Conclusion

As far as the researchers know, spoken words and phrase are much more common in movies and needless to say in everyday conversations. So it is of utmost importance to have them transferred meticulously and communicatively. If we want to get to know other nations' culture, we should have, first of all, a very good command of source language and consequently target language, as well. Let's put it in this way that as we know, translation is seen as part of intercultural studies, the very field that accounts for human beings need of communication. If we do not know each others' cultures, then how it will be possible to communicate to each other. Furthermore, it is the language that gives us our viewpoint of life. And the way we view our life is part of culture. Generally speaking, if we are about to know each others' culture, one possible solution lies in the studying the verbal communication of the nations. To be able to understand that verbal culture with ease is the task of translator.

Another pertinent field we can touch upon is in dubbing. Needless to say, almost all the movies dubbed in our country, are originally in English and laden with spoken words and phrases. So to have well-dubbed movies necessitates good rendering of the movie. This is exactly the task that put too much pressure on the translator. By going through English departments' curriculum, one immediately can see that interpretation is taught in our universities too. As it talks itself, interpretation is about oral communication and as a result, spoken words fall within it. It seems that the purposes of this course have not been met. Maybe it is time to pay much more attention to interpretation courses in our universities.

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