

Translation and Language Change

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When we look at how people usually talk about translation in everyday life, we see that the process of translating has been described in many ways with metaphors such as: *building bridges*, *ferrying* or *carrying across*, *transmission*, *transference*, etc. From one hand, most, if not all, of these popular metaphors assume the non-existence of the translator (Hermans 2002: 10). For example, for a phrase "to speak through an interpreter" as in: *Barack Obama and Iranian president Hassan Rouhani spoke through an interpreter, as is common practice for high-level diplomatic calls*,¹ one might ask what does it actually mean to speak through an interpreter, is it as if one were talking through a microphone or a telephone handset? A statement like this is eliding interpreter's intervention as if he were speaking through a disembodied individual. Similar situation can be found in expressions like *I have read Dante* which actually means that someone read a *translation* of Dante. Where's the translator there? From the other hand, these metaphors also point out to a pivotal function of a translation of bringing two languages, cultures, and even whole eras together. This, in turn, creates a specific type of contact situation where the contact between two languages takes place through translation and this will be the focus of our attention in the following paper.

It is a well-known fact that language contact is a source of language variation and change. Language contact through translation (LCTT) is a specific source of contact-induced language change, or translation-induced language change. Here the source language (SL) can have an influence on the target language (TL) both in terms of vocabulary or structures which are taken over in the process of translation. Sometimes these innovations remain limited to the translated texts, and in other instances they integrate into the TL, at least as a part of a specific genre (e.g. political discourse). However, this area has long been neglected in contact linguistics as a type of language contact, probably because of the supremacy which was assigned to the contact through spoken or direct interaction (Kranich, Becher, Hoder 2011: 11).

Insights gained from both the studies of language contact and translation can shed the light on this complex phenomenon in language change. The studies of language contact point out to several linguistic, social, political and historical facts that could have an impact on the outcome of a particular LCTT. Among these are the following facts: lexical borrowing is more prominent than structural borrowing, structural borrowing is limited to syntactic borrowing, all linguistic domains (except phonology) can be affected in LCTT, etc.

Translation studies show that translations, even of the same source text (ST) can vary significantly based on the dominant theoretical orientation that a translator has. By and large, these orientations depend on the type of ST (most likely, translators will not have the same approach when translating an advertisement, medical or technical text, and poetry, for instance), the target audience, etc. In some cases a translator might be oriented towards achieving formal equivalence, i.e. translation equivalence at the level of the language system, in others towards achieving functional/communicative equivalence, i.e. the TL naturalness of a translated text which is designed to lead to equivalent effect or response with the readers. In most of the cases, different parts of the same text are translated differently by using either the first or the second approach, but, still, there is one that is predominant and the choice of which will necessarily have an impact on the potential of translation-induced language change.

Some scholars have hypothesized that translated texts are characterized by some common, or universal, features. Baker (1996) lists four of them:

1. *Explicitation*: an overall tendency to spell things out rather than leave them implicit in translation
2. *Simplification*: the tendency to simplify the language used in translation
3. *Normalization*: a tendency to exaggerate features of the TL
4. *Levelling out*: the tendency to avoid stylistically marked ways of expression

Although it is still not clear whether these could be called *translation universals* or not, the fact remains that these features might also have influence on the outcomes of the LCTT. Kranich et al. (2011: 18) have suggested a model for

¹ Taken from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/27/obama-rouhani-phone_n_4005063.html, accessed on May 26th, 2014. at 11 am.

classifying the LCTT by using two main types of variables. On one hand, the factors concerning the socio-political background and the typological characteristics of the languages involved. On the other hand, they classified the changes that can be observed. Here are the classificatory principles:

Potentially relevant socio-political, cultural and linguistic factors in LCTT

1. Orientation of the translator
2. Intensity of contact
3. Length of contact
4. Sociopolitical dominance relations
5. Prestige of SL
6. Attitude towards the SL
7. Degree of standardization of the TL
8. Degree of establishment of the genre in the TL
9. Typological proximity
10. Potential of establishing functional equivalence between particular linguistic items

Outcome of LCTT

1. Lexical
2. Morphological
3. Syntactic
4. Pragmatic/stylistic
5. Greater explicitness of encoding in translated texts as compared to comparable non-translated texts: yes or no

In the LCTT context, we will have a closer look at a text that is considered to be one of the greatest literary influences on shaping the contours of the English language – the Bible. The most evident influence is manifested in the area of the idioms. It has been continued to be present even today. Albert Stanburrough Cook, professor of English language and literature at Yale University thus wrote in the 1920s: “No other book has so penetrated and permeated the hearts and speech of the English race as has the Bible. What Homer was to the Greeks, and the Koran to the Arabs, that – or something not unlike it – the Bible has become to the English.” (McGrath 2001: 253) Many families could afford only one book – the Bible. Many learned its passages by heart and found that their written and spoken English was shaped by the language and imagery of the Holy Scriptures. Without the English Bible, there would have been no Handel’s *Messiah*, *Paradise Lost*, *Pilgrim’s Progress* and countless other works that were inspired by the language and imagery of the Bible. Three of the most influential English Bible versions that appeared during some of the most crucial moments in the history of the English language were the Wycliffite Bible (1382; 1388), William Tyndale’s translation (1526) and the King James Version (1611). Let’s consider their theoretical orientations in translating and the LCTT outcomes.

John Wycliffe (c. 1330-84), a philosopher, theologian and church reformer sponsored the first complete translation of the Bible into English. Wycliffe’s method was to rely greatly on glossing the Latin text, seeking, where possible, to preserve the original style. The result was the growth of the Latinate lexical content. Thus, Wycliffe and his associates are credited with “more than a thousand Latin words not previously found in English.” (Hughes 2000: 143) Almost every extract shows the influence of Latin vocabulary which was either directly imported or through French as illustrated below:

1. And it was don in tho daies, a *maundement* wente out fro the *emperour* August, that al the world schulde be *discryued*.
 2. This firste *discryuyng* was maad of Cynyn, *iustice* of Sirie.
 3. And alle men wenten to make *professioun*, ech in to his owne *citee*.
 4. And Joseph wente vp fro Galilee, fro the *citee* Nazareth, in to Judee, in to a *citee* of Dauid, that is clepid Bethleem, for that he was of the hous and of the *meyne* of Dauid,
 5. that he schulde knoueleche with Marie, his wijf, that was weddid to hym, and was greet with child.
- [...]
12. ye schulen fynde a yong child wlappid in clothis, and leid in a *cratche*.
 13. And *sudenli* ther was maad with the *aungel* a *multitude* of heuenli knyythod, heriynge God,
 14. and seiynge, *Glorie* be in the hiyeste thingis to God, and in erthe *pees* be to men of good wille.

(From Luke 2:1-14, the italicized words are of Latin origin)²

Familiar English phrases and words that originate from this translation are: “woe is me”, “an eye for an eye”, “birthday”, “canopy”, “child-bearing”, “communication”, “crime”, “to dishonor”, “envy”, “frying-pan”, “godly”, “humanity”, “injury”, “jubilee”, “lecher”, “madness”, “menstruate”, “middleman”, “mountainous”, “novelty”, “Philistine”, “pollute”,

² Adapted from: Crystal 1997: 48

"puberty", "schism", "to tramp", "unfaithful", "zeal". (Bragg 2003: 86) It is obvious that the Wycliffite Bible not only enriched the English lexicon but also introduced new words for some new or current issues that later broadened their semantic field. Such was the case with "humanity", "pollute", "schism", "Philistine" which, starting from Wycliffe onwards, have been used in a variety of different ways. The Lollards, followers of John Wycliffe, spread this translation widely, thus increasing its status as a standard.

One factor of growing importance that shaped the development of English was the printed material. Having learned the skills of printing in mainland Europe, England's first printer, William Caxton (1422 – 91), returned to England, and set up his printing shop at Westminster. Not long after that, printing houses sprang up throughout the 1460s to meet the new demand for printed books. The potential of the printing press for shaping the living languages is well-known. Fixed forms of spelling were beginning to emerge and certain lexical patterns were becoming accepted as normative.

The first printed English translation of the New Testament, however, was not printed in England but in Germany and it was the translation of William Tyndale (c. 1494 – 1536), a Protestant reformer, scholar and a strong proponent of the view that people should be able to read the Bible in their own tongue. The copies of his translation, due to the hostile opposition, were smuggled and soon began to circulate throughout England.

Tyndale's New Testament was the first English vernacular text to be printed and the basis for the most subsequent versions. The rhythmical beauty, simplicity of phrase and clarity of the translation have penetrated "deep into the bedrock of English today wherever it is spoken." (Bragg 2003: 109) Tyndale's words and phrases influenced "between sixty and eighty per cent of the King James Bible of 1611 and in that second life his words and phrases circled the globe." (Some of the words and phrases that are still in use today are "scapegoat", "let there be light", "my brother's keeper", "fight the good fight", "flowing with milk and honey", "the apple of his eye", "a man after his own heart", "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak", "signs of the times", "ye of little faith", "eat, drink and be merry", "broken-hearted", "a prophet has no honour in his own country", "a stranger in a strange land", "a law unto themselves", "let my people go", "fisherman", "Jehovah", "landlady", "Passover", "sea-shore", "stumbling-block", "taskmaster", "viper", "zealous". He also widened the semantic field of some words such as "beautiful" that previously referred only to human beauty. Words that were employed by Tyndale have been used by a number of writers in the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada, Africa, on the Indian subcontinent; writers that absorbed Tyndale's rhythms and that have been enriched by the "vocabulary for thought" that Tyndale's language provided. (Bragg 2003: 109-110)

Tyndale felt that "Hebrew syntax had an affinity with English form" and said that "[t]he matter of speaking is both one; so that in a thousand places thou needest not but to translate it into the English, word for word". The syntactical rapport between the two languages can be seen in word order and in the rise of the noun + of + noun construction typical of English biblical prose. Hence, "instead of 'Moses' book', we have 'the book of Moses'; instead of 'a strong man', 'a man of strength'". (Bobrick 2001:117) There were also influences on the superlative forms. Hence, instead of "the holiest place" or "the most holy", we have "the holy of holies" for the innermost part of the tabernacle and later Solomon's temple, and instead of "the best song", we have "the song of songs" as the name for the poetic book of the Hebrew Scriptures which in Hebrew is named after the two opening words *Shir hash-Shi-rim*.

With this translation, the original Hebrew text of the Pentateuch was in English for the first time. Thus, instead of "*Fiat lux, et facta est lux*", Tyndale gave 'Let there be light, and there was light'. (Daniell 2003: 148) He was also the first to translate God's personal name, Jehovah, into English from its original sources.³

It is generally claimed that Tyndale's contribution to the English language is significant since he "translated into a register just above common speech, allied in its clarity to proverbs", a language that "speaks directly to the heart" aiming to achieve accuracy and clarity. (Daniell 2003: 158)

Tyndale's translation is praised for its "rhythmical beauty of his prose, skillful use of synonyms for freshness, variety, and point, and 'magical simplicity of phrase'" all of which left the imprints on all later versions, down to the present day. His diction is said to have become "the consecrated dialect of English speech". One of the distinguishing features of his translation is that he rendered some ecclesiastical terms such as "priest", "Church", "penance" and "charity" into easily understandable, more accurate and closer to the original sense "elder", "congregation", "repentance" and "love". Furthermore, many of the phrases that have gone into common use such as, "the powers that be", "the signs of the times", "knock and it shall be opened unto you", were coined by Tyndale. At a time when most scholars communicated in Latin, he insisted on being understood by ordinary people and preferred a simple Saxon syntax of subject-verb-object. He gave the Bible-reading nation an "English plain style" serving, thus, as a basis for the great Elizabethan writers.⁴ (Bobrick

³ It is a transliteration of Hebrew יהוה, a vocalization of the sacred Tetragrammaton יהוה, the name that, according to the Bible, God revealed to his people.

⁴ There seems to be some truth in the remark "without Tyndale, no Shakespeare".

2001: 105)

The King James Bible, along with the works of William Shakespeare, is frequently singled out as one of the essential influences on the development of the modern English language. They both date from the late English Renaissance, when English was coming into its own as a language. The King James Version (KJV) is characterized by the beauty and elegance of expression and thus modeled both written and spoken eloquence of English. The achievement of poetic and prosaic elegance was the result of the principle of the translators not to render some Hebrew or Greek words by exactly the same English terms throughout the text. They felt free to use a range of English words and phrases that they judged appropriate which was "a clear sign of a growing sense of confidence in English as a living language". (McGrath 2001: 255) This principle that on one hand allowed the achievement of wider lexical range and richness of the text that would otherwise have been possible and led to a lack of strict accuracy on the other, was stated in the preface of the work:

"We have not tied ourselves to an uniformity of phrasing or an identity of words, as some peradventure would wish that we have done...But that we should express the same notion in the same particular word, as for example, if we translate the Hebrew or Greek word once by "purpose", never to call it "intent"...we thought to savour more of curiosity than wisdom."

The growing acceptance of the KJV in shaping private and public religious discourse inevitably had its impact on the language as a whole that itself was in a state of flux. Many Hebraic, Greek and Latin words and phrases have been naturalized in English through the regular use in biblical context during the private and public reading. These phrases have become so common in everyday English use that many speakers are unaware of their biblical origin.

Some of the Hebraic idioms that have crept into regular English usage include: "to lick the dust", "to fall flat on his face", "a man after his own heart", "to pour out one's heart", "the land of the living", "under the sun", "our grapes", "from time to time", "pride goes before a fall", "the skin of my teeth", "to stand in awe", "to put words in his mouth", "to go from strength to strength", "like a lamb to the slaughter", etc. There are also some standard English phrases that minor modifications of Hebraic originals in the KJV: "rise and shine" (a variant on "arise, shine" from Isaiah 60:1), "to see the writing on the wall" (from Daniel 5:5), "a drop in a bucket" (a variant on "a drop of a bucket" from Isaiah 40:15). (McGrath 2001: 263)

Some of the phrases that originate from Greek which were absorbed in English are: "the salt of the earth", "a thorn in the flesh", "the scales fell from his eyes", "the powers that be", "and it came to pass", "cast your pearls before swine", "in sheep's clothing", "new wine in old bottles", "if the blind lead the blind", "all things to all men", etc.

The early modern English era was marked by the lexical debate known as "the Inkhorn controversy".⁵ The debate emerged over how new words should be coined. Should they be formed from existing English roots or the classical languages that were used as a source for new words? This lexical anxiety can be seen in the biblical translations of the early modern period. One extreme can be seen in the attempt to avoid as many classical terms as possible and replace them with Anglo-Saxon equivalents like: "frosent" for "apostle", "hundreder" for "centurion", "mooned" for "lunatic", "byword" for "parable", etc. The other extreme was to retain as much as possible of the traditional Latin vocabulary of the medieval church resulting in a translation that did not read as natural English. For instance, the Douai-Rheims translation (1582-1610) of a phrase in Philippians 2:8 reads as follows: "He exinanited himself" can be contrasted with the perfectly clear English of the KJV: "He humbled himself". It has been estimated that approximately "93 percent of the words used in the KJV (including the repetitions of the same words) are native English rather than Latinisms or other linguistic imports". (McGrath 2001: 262) Furthermore, Latinisms and Hellenisms used in the translation don't stand out as crude neologisms because they have been absorbed into the language.

Another impact that the KJV had on the English language was the adoption and the prolongation of the use of some archaic forms that were already dying out in the everyday English speech at the beginning of the seventeenth century. For instance, one of the distinctive features of the KJV is the use of the pronouns "thou", "thee", "thy" and "thine" which were the singular forms of the Middle English pronouns: "Ye", "You", "Your".

⁵*The man that hadde an enk-horn in his rigge (belt)*

This is from Wycliffe's translation of the Bible, it is a very early use of Ink Horn, used to describe the container used to hold ink in. The term was then taken and adapted by those against the 'ornate' French words found in more and more English writings. These words became known as 'ink-horn' terms as they used up or wasted lots of ink and made English words sound more sophisticated and dignified.

	Singular	Plural	Modern English
Nominative	Thou	Ye	You
Accusative	Thee	You	You
Genitive	Thy	Your	Your

Table 1.1.

In the early stages of the Middle English period, “thou” was used to address another person. However, under the influence of French during the Middle Ages, the situation became more complex since the English pronoun “you” came to have the same association as the French “vous”. Consequently, the singular forms (thou, thee, thy) were used for addressing children, people of inferior social status or generally within a family, while the plural forms (ye, you, your) were adopted as a mark of respect when addressing superiors. Hence, by the sixteenth century, the use of the singular forms to address a single individual was falling out of use in English, except in family relations and when addressing inferiors. Nevertheless, the KJV retained the archaic use and, thus, uses “thou” to refer to God, Jesus, the devil and a human being which can be seen from the following passages:

“And Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days, Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place, and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh’s cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his Butler. But think on me, when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house.”
 (Genesis 40:12-14, italics, P.B.)

“And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”
 (Luke 4:5-8, italics, P.B.)

“And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.”
 (Acts 24:1-4, italics, P.B.)

The question that arises is why did the translators of the KJV retain these archaic terms that were falling out of use? The answer lies in the instructions that were given to the translators not to depart to any significant extent from the text of the Bishop’s Bible (1568) which itself was only a revision of the Great Bible (1539) and this one a revision of Matthew’s Bible (1537) and finally, this one a revision of Tyndale’s translation (1525) that was incorporated in the KJV. These instructions caused the continuity of the same language forms over a period in which the English language underwent changes.

The rules provided for the translations more or less bound them to use the language of 1525 in their translation. Such is the case with older Middle English verbal endings that are found in both translations. The Middle English verbal endings were in use in the sixteenth century but they were beginning to be changed. Perhaps, the most indicative example is the one of the second and third person singular forms of the present tense:

	<i>to say</i>	<i>to give</i>	<i>to have</i>
Thou	sayest	givest	hast
He	sayeth	giveth	hath

Table 1.2.

The widespread use of “you” during the sixteenth century meant that the second person singular form of the verb ceased to be chiefly used which caused the following shifts in conversational English:

	<i>to say</i>	<i>to give</i>	<i>to have</i>
You	say	give	have

Table 1.3.

The third person singular also underwent the changes. Generally, the ending “-eth” was replaced with “-s”. However, there is evidence suggesting that the older ending was pronounced as if it were “-s”.⁶

This use of newer forms may clearly be seen as an established one in the following passage from Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-98):

*How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.
(Act 5, Scene 1)⁷*

The older verbal endings were in general use in Tyndale’s time, but by 1611 they were archaic. Still, the KJV translators used the same older Middle English verbal endings which perpetuated the use of the obsolete forms.

Being a revision and not a fresh translation, the King James Bible “was born archaic: it was intended as a step back. The Bishop’s Bible of 1568 was not only itself out of date: it was reworking of the second Great Bible, of 1540.” (Daniell 2003: 441) This being the case, it perpetuated some archaic forms in the language. There were several reasons for this:

first, it was intended to reset the standard of the solid middle-of-the-road Anglican establishment, historically built since King Henry handed down the *Verbum Dei*. Second, Latinity, rather than contemporary English, was thought to bring with it the great weight of the authority of the past, of what was understood as fifteen hundred years of solid Christian faith, as well as generations of Latin education: and there were those who refer to the Bible’s “original text” meaning the Latin Vulgate. There is a third, more fundamental point. The world is divided into those who think that sacred Scripture should always be elevated above the common run – is not, indeed sacred without some air of religiosity, of being remote from real life, with a whiff of the antiquarian, and on the other side those who say [...] that if the Greek is ordinary Greek, then ordinary English words are essential. (Daniell 2003: 442)

Generally, the public and private reading of the Bible for centuries has had an enormous influence on the development of the language on the level of the lexicon, grammar and preservation of many forms and constructions which were falling out of use elsewhere. Different translations of the time show great variation at the theological and stylistic level but also in typography, presentation and editorial work. Their significance, from the perspective of historical linguistics is immeasurable, since, as David Crystal noted, its “range and frequency of editions provides an unparalleled opportunity to view the development of the language at that time”. Furthermore, these different translations of the same core text can throw light on changes in orthography, grammar and vocabulary across the centuries as well as on the translation norm.

The above discussion has shown that translation induced language change can be a significant source for language change and variation. It is an area of contact linguistics and translation studies that should not be neglected. Furthermore, when it comes to the English translations of the Bible, it is clear that theoretical orientation of translators influenced significantly on the potential of change in LCTT situations which can be seen most clearly at the level of

⁶ Richard Hodges in his *Special Help to Orthography*, published in 1643, states that although it was not unusual to see written forms of verbs ending in “-eth” like “leadeth” in everyday speech it was customary to say “leads”, the implications of which are remarkable. For a further discussion see: Alister McGrath, *op.cit.*, p.273.

⁷ <http://www.william-shakespeare.info/act5-script-text-merchant-of-venice.htm>, accessed on: Friday, September 04, 2009, at 7pm.

lexicon, but as well at the syntactic one. It left deep imprints on shaping the contours of the English language that can be seen even today. It is enough only to google some of the biblical phrases and find numerous examples of its everyday use in genres such as politics, sport reporting, advertisements, etc.

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