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AWARENESS OF CULTURAL REALITIES AND SPEECH COMMUNITIES IN TRANSLATION

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Abstract

It has been stated that both the word “culture” and the syntagm “cultural realities” have influenced both communication and translation to a great extent.

Moreover, the syntagm “speech community” has been tackled from many perspectives. One of them is that it cannot be determined by static physical location but it may represent an insight into a nation state, village, religious institutions, and so on. Although speech communities may take any and all of these shapes and more, it is not a flexible concept, altering shape and meaning according to any new gathering of people.

Linguists offered different definitions of the syntagm ‘speech communities’, each definition representing a new perspective in approaching this term.

Translating cultural realities constitutes not only a challenge but also an audacity on the part of the translator. In this respect, we have chosen to cross the religious communities and survey both their language and cultural realities and how they are mediated in translation.

Consequently, translating religious terminology requires the translator’s competence since it encompasses the Truth that has to be accurately reproduced in the TC (target culture). His/her task is also to raise the target reader’s awareness of such realities and language.

LANGUAGE AND SPEECH COMMUNITIES

It is common knowledge that sociolinguistics has influenced translation studies from many points of view. On the one hand, it has brought its contribution to the survey on how language is relevant to both social and communicative situations. In such circumstances, the translator's task is to deal with language in texts and features of the text (i.e. regional dialect). On the other hand, sociolinguistics has given rise to the analysis of "the translator's response to the needs of a target audience operating in a different language and culture" (Hatim, 2001, p. 82).

A new perspective is suggested by Nida (1996, p. 25). He differentiates between linguistics, which is "the study of the structures of languages and the relations between such structures", and sociolinguistics, which is "the study of the uses of languages within a speech community and the values associated with these uses".

Nonetheless, he considers it to be impossible "to talk about sociolinguistics without also talking about the structures of languages, and similarly it makes no sense to talk about languages without recognizing that they only have relevance in the culture of which they are a part" (ibidem).

Nida (ibidem, p. 32) also highlights the idea that the group or society is the entity which has an utmost importance in sociolinguistics, because it is the one which accepts or declines innovation. Moreover, he views society as "the setting at which language and culture coalesce, in the sense that culture cannot succeed without language and language is only relevant in terms of its capacity to reflect the culture".

Mention should be made that a group or a 'speech community' is of great relevance to the study of language in culture and society. However, many have struggled to define a speech community.

People sharing a speech community build norms about uses of language. In Hymes' (1974, p. 51) opinion, a speech community is "a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech. Such sharing comprises knowledge of at least one

form of speech, and knowledge also of its patterns of use".

Viewed from the angle of linguistic anthropology, the syntagm 'speech communities' refers to speakers who interact in terms of social and cultural norms and values encompassed in discursive practices. This definition of speech communities does not point to physical locations. It rather refers to a part of a nation-state, village, club, on-line chat room, religion institution, neighborhood, etc. Despite the fact that a speech community may take various forms, it is not a "malleable concept, changing shape, form and meaning according to scholarly need or any new gathering of people" (Marcyliena qtd. in Duranti, 2001, p. 31).

It is commonplace that whenever individuals interact through discursive practices, they state their set of beliefs, values, norms and local knowledge. Moreover, knowledge of communicative practices, mutual intelligibility and communicative competence are relevant in defining a speech community.

Linguists such as Bloomfield (1933), Hockett (1958), Gumperz (1968), Lyons (1970), Labov (1972), Bolinger (1975), Milroy and Milroy (1978), Hudson (1980), Kramsch (1998) and Bonvillain (2003) offered different definitions of the syntagm 'speech communities', each definition representing a new perspective in approaching this term.

As a starting point, a speech community is, in Bloomfield's perspective (1933, p. 42), "a group of people who interact by means of speech". His definition of speech community makes us think of a shared single language within the community. However, some may believe that some people interact by means of one language and others by means of another.

Following the same line of the interaction within a speech community, Milroy and Milroy (1978, p. 13) approached the syntagm 'speech network' claiming that people's language is analyzed within speech communities and networks because they generate social and cultural beliefs about how society is formed.

According to Lyons (1970, p. 326), a speech community gathers "[...] all the people who use a given language (or dialect)". In the light of this definition, in the case of bilingual individuals, speech communities may overlap

and do not need to have any social or cultural homogeneity. In this respect, it is possible to set a border between speech communities to the extent that it is possible to differentiate between languages and dialects.

Moreover, Hockett's (1958, p. 8) definition seems to be more intricate:

"Each language defines a speech community: the whole set of people who *communicate* with each other, either *directly* or *indirectly*, via the common language" (emphasis in the original).

Unlike Lyons, Hockett intervenes by bringing to light the criterion of communication within the community.

In addition, Gumperz (1968, p. 382) indicates the existence of a number of linguistic differences between the members of a speech community and those outside it. He defines a speech community as "any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language use".

Labov (1972, p. 120) gives a greater importance to "shared attitudes to language" (like shared norms and abstract patterns of variation), rather than shared speech behaviour:

"The speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms; these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behaviour, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage."

Moreover, Bolinger (1975, p. 333) mentions that any population is supposed to encompass a variety of speech communities:

"There is no limit to the ways in which human beings league themselves together for self-identification, security, gain, amusement, worship, or any of the other purposes that are held in common; consequently there is no limit to the number and variety of speech communities that are to be found in society."

According to Hudson (1980, p. 25), both the syntagms 'speech community' and 'linguistic community' share the same meaning referring to "a community based on language".

Kramsch (1998) considers that speakers, as members of a certain social community, share common attitudes, beliefs and values as the other members of the same group. These common attitudes, beliefs and values they share are mirrored in the way the group's members use language.

In addition, she differentiates between the syntagm 'speech communities', which she defines as communities composed of people who use the same linguistic code, and the syntagm 'discourse community' which she views as embodying "the common ways in which members of a social group use language to meet their social needs" (Kramsch 1998, p. 6- p. 7).

The members of a social group distinguish from the others through the grammatical, lexical and phonological features of their language, the topics they choose and their "discourse accent" (ibidem). Additionally, she emphasizes the idea that people identify themselves as members of a community to the extent that they see themselves as insiders against others.

She considers that both a community's language and its material achievements highlight the difference between insiders and outsiders. Hereby, culture becomes a process that both includes and excludes.

The language use is a marker of a person's social identity. As Bonvillain (2003) states, there is a linkage between social factors (such as age, class, gender, race, ethnicity and so forth) and language for many reasons. One reason may be that sociolinguistic behaviour is "inherently variable; that is, each speaker makes use of the full range of options available in the community, such as alternatives of pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence construction" (Bonvillain 2003, p. 4).

People inside a speech community use specific vocabulary or certain types of grammatical constructions. In this respect, Bonvillain (ibidem, p. 5) puts forward the idea that:

"In some cultures, the style of speech used in different contexts are sharply distinguished, whereas in others, linguistic styles are less differentiated. Even within a culture, some people are more sensitive than others to contextual cues and adjust their speech

accordingly. Sensitivity to context may be related to such social factors as gender or class, or it may be related to an individual's participation in many different types of situations."

Consequently, each definition of the syntagm 'speech community' reflects a different phenomenon. In our opinion, Lyon's definition is limited as it does not consider the social and cultural context. Therefore, we agree with Hockett's definition because he focuses on communication within the community by means of a common language. Moreover, from the sociolinguistic point of view, the definitions provided by Labov and Gumperz are relevant since they lay emphasis on the interaction within the community's members as a social process. We consider Kramsch's definition to be the closest to the purpose of our research since it provides a holistic view on both culture and speech communities.

STUDIES ON TRANSLATING CULTURAL REALITIES

As aforementioned, a speech community is of great relevance to the study of language in culture. Many studies on cultural realities translation have been conducted. For instance, Krings (1986, p. 263-p. 274) surveyed the translating process of some students who attempted to translate into their mother tongue, the problems they had to face and the translation strategies they used. The study was conducted with eight native German speakers.

Mention should be made that half of the subjects translated a German text into French and the other half a French text into German. The difficulty of the texts lied in the translation of the grammatical, semantic and stylistic structures. The parallel corpora contained the French text which was an article from the satirical journal *Le Canard Enchaîné* and the German text which was a humorous article from the newspaper *Rheinische Post* (ibidem, p. 264).

The research method applied was Think Aloud Protocol (1986, p. 265). Following this method, the students repeated their thoughts aloud while translating and their comments were written down.

After ending the translation process, Krings identified five translation strategies:

comprehension, equivalent retrieval, equivalent monitoring, decision-making and reduction (1986, p. 268). We should add that retrieval strategies involve cultural realities. According to Krings, the 'potential equivalent retrieval strategy' may be translated as "the search for an equivalent" (1986, p. 271).

The next step they turned to was monitoring. At this stage, the students differentiated between the source language and target language items and attempted to find discrepancies between them in meaning, connotation, style or use (ibidem).

Another study was conducted by Kujamäki (qtd. in Naukkarinen, 2006) where he surveyed Hannu Salama's novels and short stories that have been translated into German.

Kujamäki chose Salama's works since they were highly culture-specific. One of the objectives of the study was to make generalizations about the translatability of cultural realities. Nonetheless, Kujamäki forewarned that literary texts should not be viewed only as culturally or biographically educational books. He explained that if the reader concentrated only on their authenticity and accuracy, the aesthetic value of the novel would vanish.

Moreover, the aim of the study was not to assess the correctness of the individual translation methods but to examine why a particular strategy was preferred and how the meaning of the original cultural realities has altered in the translating process. Two of the problems raised were how the reader reacts to foreign elements in the TT and how cultural realities translations may overcome the foreignness of the novels.

For the purpose of our research, Kujamäki's assertion is worth mentioning. In his opinion, the differences between the translations relied on the atmosphere of their times, the cultural-political circumstances and the publisher's own agenda.

Finally, we would like to mention Öhquist (qtd. in Naukkarinen 2006) who translated two versions of *Seitsemän veljestä*. Her translation method was to use explicitations and some direct transfer but a variety of the place names and proper nouns were intentionally omitted. Moreover, one sixth of all cultural realities were

left out. However, Öhquist's other interpretation of the same novel in 1962 included all the omitted features, some metaphors were translated word-for-word and the strategy of direct transfer was used.

Consequently, all the studies conducted by Krings (1986), Kujamäki (qtd. in Naukkarinen 2006) and Öhquist (qtd. in Naukkarinen 2006) were very influential in cultural realities translation. Moreover, the strategies they used ranged from literally translation to equivalent retrieval, equivalent monitoring, explicitation and reduction. As far as the culturally-bound-TT is concerned, we do not agree to Kujamäki's (ibidem) opinion that the aesthetic value of the novel vanishes if the reader concentrates only on their authenticity and accuracy. The resolution of this problem lies in the competency of the translator and his/her awareness of the cultural realities in translation.

Cultural realities and speech communities in translation. As aforementioned, the translator has to be aware of the cultural realities in translation and the difficulties they generate. We can argue that the translation difficulties are due very largely to the author's intention, considered to be in relation to the linguistic-cultural context in which the text is built. Moreover, in the case of cultural realities, the translator has to be aware of choosing the right translation strategy as the translated text should have a similar effect as the original. It is significant whether they are translated close to the original or reconstructed to suit the TL. In the first situation, the reader is consciously aware that s/he is reading a translated text and, in the latter case, this discussion does not mingle with the flow of reading.

For the purpose of our research, we thought of analyzing some Romanian cultural realities embedded in the Orthodox-Christian speech communities in *Zobie* (1983) by Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea and its translation *Zobie* (1983) realized by Fred Nadaban and John W. Rathbun (see Table 1, 2). We also attempted to provide our own translation of cultural realities which fitted the given contexts.

Our study is corpus-based. The texts selected for investigation comprise Romanian cultural realities which the translators attempted

to render into English in such a way that the local colour wouldn't disappear.

Mention should be made that the Romanian cultural realities chosen for discussion are a part of the Romanian culture which is an Orthodox-Christian one. The religious terms/ syntagms and the Romanian aphorisms specific to the Romanian culture pose multiple problems to the translators, therefore, they have to look for the right strategy so that they may describe the reality of the source culture.

In Table 1, the ST (source text) is highly culture-specific. Questions may arise: "How much of the ST can be translated?" "Does the TT (target text) produce an 'equivalent' effect?"

In Table 1, in the case of the aphorism *Peste ce-a făcut natura de prăpăstios, numai geniul și prostia stăpânesc*, the two translators chose to make an inversion at the level of the syntax (*It's only genius and stupidity that can rule over nature's most spectacular aspects*) so that the meaning may be properly conveyed. In the TT2, we also chose the same strategy in order to fill to the cultural gap, adding little to the sense (*It is mere genius and stupidity that can govern our mother nature's inborn things*). Nouns will be singular and tenses will be in the present in order to transmit the same meaning and reality. We used expletives since the translation needed expansion to render the same meaning.

Moreover, the following aphorisms express a deep insight and awareness of the Romanian culture, that is to say, they express cultural realities: *A stăpâni sau a nu înțelege e singurul mijloc de-a nu suferi. A pricepe tot sau a nu te sinchisi de nimic, aceasta e singura taină a vieții*. In Table 1, the difference between TT1 and TT2 lies in that we chose to make an inversion at the syntax level because we considered that the translation would be communicative. The infinitives were also preserved in translations.

The Table 2 also contains some highly culture-specific elements. In the TT2, the proper noun *Ilie* was preserved, therefore, bringing some local flavour to the text. We preserved the original proper noun for authenticity. We also consider that translating *S-tul Ilie* as *St. Ely* the text would generate intertextuality. Being

Orthodox-Christian, we could not forget Jesus' words on the Cross (Eli, Eli, Lama Sabactani?) ("Dumnezeul Meu, Dumnezeul Meu, pentru ce M-ai părăsit" ["My God, My God, what have You left Me for; our translation"]) (The New Testament, 2002; Matei 27, 46).

During His ordeal on the Cross, the Jewish people could not accurately translate these Aramaic words. Instead, they thought Jesus Christ cried for Saint Ilie. It is also for that reason that we chose to preserve the Romanian version of the proper noun. In this context, the translators also resorted to reduction. The reduced form *S-tul* in the ST was rendered as *St.* in the TT1 and TT2.

In translating culture-specific terminology, the translator should grasp the original style and the atmosphere of the text. Otherwise they are obliterated. We consider that the culture-specific word specific to the religious communities *preziua* should be explained (*on the eve of that day*) because the original text is dependent on the atmosphere of its times, that is on its archaicity. This atmosphere is still preserved in the Orthodox Christian churches by means of the language used. These culture-specific words which express cultural realities (*ghesefturile*) add colour to the text.

Consequently, language and culture are literally inseparable. In other words, culture is infused in language. Mention should be made that where cultural features are structurally inherent in linguistic units, translation becomes difficult.

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CORPUS:

Ștefănescu Delavrancea, B., 'Zobie', ediție bilingvă, tradus de F. Nabadan and J. W. Rathbun în *Cu bilet circular*, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Dacia, 1983.

Ștefănescu Delavrancea, B., 'Zobie', bilingual edition, trans. by F. Nabadan and J. W. Rathbun in *With Circular Ticket*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Publishing House, 1983.

Table no. 1: Culture-specific (1)

<p>CU BILET CIRCULAR (PROZĂ SCURTĂ ROMÂNEASCĂ) WITH CIRCULAR TICKET (ROMANIAN SHORT STORIES)</p>	<p>ZOBIE de Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea</p>	<p>ZOBIE transl. by Fred Nadaban and John W. Rathbun</p>	<p>OUR TRANSLATION</p>
	<p>ST: <i>Peste ce-a făcut natura de prăpăstios, numai geniul și prostia stăpânesc.</i> Aici numai pătrunderea fără seamăn și negliobia fără pic de înțeles pot prida. <i>A stăpâni sau a nu înțelege e singurul mijloc de-a nu suferi. A pricepe tot sau a nu te sinchisi de nimic, aceasta e singura taină a vieții.</i></p>	<p>TT1: <i>It's only genius and stupidity that can rule over nature's most spectacular aspects.</i> Here only matchless insight or senseless stupidity can manage. <i>Either to master or not to understand at all is the only way to escape suffering. To understand everything or to mind nothing – this is the great secret of life.</i></p>	<p>TT2: <i>It is mere genius and stupidity that can govern our mother nature's inborn things.</i> In this case, only the peerless spirituality and senseless stupidity can cope. <i>The only way to avoid suffering is either to rule or not to see. The mystery of life lies in either to perceive everything or to fear nothing.</i></p>

Table no. 2: Culture-specific elements (2)

<p>CU BILET CIRCULAR (PROZĂ SCURTĂ ROMÂNEASCĂ) WITH CIRCULAR TICKET (ROMANIAN SHORT STORIES)</p>	<p>ZOBIE de Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea</p>	<p>ZOBIE transl. by Fred Nadaban and John W. Rathbun</p>	<p>OUR TRANSLATION</p>
	<p>ST: Carele cu stambă, cu zeghii, cu cioareci, cu flori de tâtg cu lăzi și tronuri, și câte și mai câte, descărcău în pripă, căci <i>S-tul Ilie</i>, în anul acesta, făgăduia minunea minunelor. Câțiva ovrei, veniți din Pitești, grași și rumeni, vorbeau repede, încurcat, și-și spuneau mulțumiți „<i>gheșeturile</i>” din <i>preziuă</i>.</p>	<p>TT1: The carts carrying printed calico, twilled cloth coats, tight peasant trousers, sweets, cases and chests, and what not, were unloading hastily, for <i>St. Ely's</i> seemed to promise the miracle of miracles that year. Some fat and ruddy Jews coming from Pitești were talking quickly in tangled sentences, telling each other about <i>the previous day's bargains</i>.</p>	<p>TT2: The carts full of printed calico, the peasants' twilled cloth coats, tight peasant trousers, sweets, trunks and sways, and many others were they unloading in haste, for <i>St. Ilie</i> seemed to promise the miracle of miracles that year. A few fat and healthy Jews coming from Pitești were talking quickly in an awkward language, comfortably sharing their <i>business</i> done <i>on the eve of that day</i>.</p>