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ILLUSIVENESS OF LINGUISTIC SIGNS IN CULTURALLY INCONGRUENT CONTEXTS – TRANSLATORIAL RAMIFICATIONS

Abstract: In his portentous article “Logic and Conversation” (1975), British linguist and philosopher, Paul Grice, shows that prudence and intellect empower human kind in an obliging way to successfully generate messages that are sent via conversational implicatures. If this notion is strictly observed by translators, it would transpire that letters on paper have a deeper meaning and several strata hidden from a cursory glance. Text becomes a palimpsest of intended messages, each laden with implicature upon implicature. In such a concoction of callings, the translator progresses into a plenipotentiary judge of meanings, sending some to oblivion while bestowing preeminence upon others. It is this dichotomist facet of the translation process that this paper aims to explore, taking a broad, wide-ranging approach to the common, underpinning cultural issues, while at the same time observing their specific manifestations in the two subject languages: English and Serbian.

Key words: culture, translation, implicature, doctrine, English, Serbian.

1. Introduction

Translation is a quintessentially multi-faceted and multi-problematic process with different manifestations, realisations and ramifications, which might explain why, in recent years, the focus of translation studies has shifted from endless debates about equivalence to broader issues, including culture and its effect on both the

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process and product of translation. Being part of a broader discipline, the study of the connection between linguistic properties of a text and cultural surrounding that engenders it, the translatorial process is often demarcated as a study of language use, that is, “the study of purposes for which such linguistic forms are used” (Stalinker 1973, 380). It is also often seen as a transcreation inculcated within the constraints of the discourse of the targeted culture. Culture thus becomes an essential and ubiquitous element in any translatorial consideration. Nida (2002, 157) defines culture as “the total beliefs and practices of a society”.

Overlooking this facet would be tantamount to overlooking culture in translation and vice versa. Further, some studies (Snell-Hornby 1988/1995; Bassnett 1980) have shown that the translation process can no longer be seen as being merely between two linguistic systems, but is envisaged as being between two cultures. Observed from such a vista, Snell-Hornby’s (1988: 46), endorsement of Vermeer’s (1986) views, would imply that translation is “a cross-cultural transfer, and the translator should be bicultural, if not pluricultural”. Needless to say, no matter how well prepared, there will always be certain cultural discrepancies that impede the translator’s progress while rendering the text at hand owing to the illusive extra information hidden in the original text that need not be present as such, or in the same amount, in the end-product in the TT.

1.1 Cultural implications

Translating a text from one language to another is frequently wrought with head-banging difficulties owing to the fact that the people in the source culture and the source text originators conceptualise their experience of the world in different ways. Nida and Reyburn (1981, 2) maintain that the issues stemming from cultural inconsistencies “constitute the most serious problem for translators and have produced the most far-reaching misunderstandings amongst readers”. Relying on the pontification put forth by Blum-Kulka (1986; 19), Baker (1992; 183) assesses that every language has its own stylistic conventions and preferences in using certain textual patterns, that is, cohesive devices, thematic patterns, and parallel structures. Accordingly, it would transpire that culture is not “a material phenomenon”, consisting of “things, people, behaviour, or emotion” (Goodenough 1964, 39-40). Instead, it is an organisation of these things since words only have meaning in terms of the culture in which they are used, and although languages do not determine culture, they certainly tend to reflect a society’s beliefs and practices.

Consequently, Peter France points out that theoreticians today have a far more complex task than the mere differentiation between what is good and what is bad;

what they are concerned with nowadays is the different options that translators can utilise and the ways they can be adapted in conformity with the historical, sociological and cultural context (France 2000; 24). It is the manifested forms of things that people have in mind, their models and moulds of perception, correlation and interpretation. Namely, globalisation has also had its antithesis epitomised in the increased interest for one's cultural roots and one's own inherent identity, assuming that the things people say and do, their social activities and procedures, are products or offshoots of their culture as they relate it to the job of noticing and operating within their circumstances. Thus, the translator, as the Irish theoretician Michael Cronin nicely described it, is also a passenger, one who roams from one culture to another (2000; 88). There are other approaches too, Katan (1999, 26), for example, describes culture as a "shared mental model or map" for interpreting reality and organising experience of the world. In such an arena, culture can be seen as a "system of congruent and interrelated beliefs, values, strategies and cognitive environments which guide the shared basis of behaviour".

2. A place for doctrines

Just as every culture is autonomous in the creation of its social values, it is likewise self-governing in the creation of customs and beliefs that define it. Some of those self-defining creeds are strongly entrenched in the use of language and communication. When an American executive places his/her feet on the desk, the message of authority and relaxation that is being sent is readily understood, while the same gesture in an Arabic country would have a totally different implication, one of disdain and insult. Such implications can be culture specific or culture ubiquitous. To better illustrate the dichotomy, it would be useful to recall Grice's views on the efficiency of communication as being dependent on adherence to four maxims. In his portentous article "Logic and Conversation" (1975), he shows that prudence and intellect empower human kind in an obliging way to successfully generate and construe messages that are sent via conversational implicatures.

Successful generation and construal of implicatures is a complex process in its own right, let alone their translation. Circumventing certain taboos, settling cultural mismatches, upholding certain cultural preferences, and similar, shows how translators undergo a painstaking and meticulous scrutiny when completing a version of a TT. While language users generally observe the maxims of conversation in terms of quality (plausibility and sensibility of utterances), quantity (using the adequate quantitate measure and size of utterances and avoiding long-windedness),

manner (stating ideas with clarity and intelligibility), and relation (being up to the point and avoiding unnecessary verbosity), in many cases they can opt to contravene a conversational maxim for the sake of convenience and transfer the message circuitously, especially since certain ethnic incongruences place extra burdens on the translator, necessitating examination of the underlying emblematic layers of the ST in order to inculcate the cultural effects intended by the author of the source text.

Breaching or manipulating a maxim conforms quite well to the hypothesis of 'cooperation' in human interaction. In other words, the utterer is by default aware of two facets: firstly, the fact that they are disobeying a maxim of conversation and, secondly, the supposition that the listener can construe the conversational implicature in that particular exclamation. Nida and Reyburn (1981, 2) hypothesise that the problems arising out of cultural discrepancies "constitute the most serious problem for translators and have produced the most far-reaching misunderstandings amongst readers". For example, a speaker's saying 'That's hilarious!', when talking to a converser who has just spilled coffee or a beverage on his trousers should not be construed at face value; In Serbian, that phrase would perhaps sound more like 'Istina!'. Both exclamations having totally different construals in ordinary situations. Otherwise, they would actually indicate, sarcastically, 'That's terrible' by the speaker and would require an apology. Consequently, the process of communication continues unhampered, owing to social reasonableness and the cognitive prowess of people, all inculcated in the compliant codes between the utterance generator and the receptor.

2.1 Fatic and Conversational Aspects of Intralingual Translation

During a common parlance, the text originator may want to utter only a segment of the message, leaving it up to the translator, to approach "the network of conceptual relations which underlie the surface text" (Baker 1992, 218), in which case, it will be the recipient's erudition that will serve as the amalgam in filling the absent parts of the message. Take for example certain formulaic expressions existing in English and Serbian. The question "What's up?" or its similar version in Serbian "Šta ima?" do not really beg for a true and pertinent answer. Jargon users in both languages will know better than to take them literally. In such a situation, it does not refer to worldly processes or ongoing events, rather it is a form of a streetwise greeting, in which case successful translators need to be insiders in both cultures. In other words, they need to possess deep and intimate knowledge of the cultural experience in the SL, and be insiders in the target culture. Only then will they be able to resonate the corresponding cultural experience in the TL. According

to Blakemore's (2002, 71) observation, the fatic function, that is, conversational implicature, can only manifest itself when translators "go further than what is explicitly written, and metarepresent the ST thoughts about what he would think as relevant enough".

The terms 'fatic' or 'insider' can stand in opposition to the term 'outsider' which was first introduced by the linguist Kenneth Pike (1957). Other terms, such as 'etic', derived from phonetic, and 'emic', derived from phonemic, and similar derivations, came into being as a response to the "need to include nonverbal behavior in linguistic description" (Pike 1993, 18). In 2003, Anderson (391) underlined the importance of taking into consideration both the 'etics' - the superficial level of the language - and 'emics' - the symbolic level of the language - while dealing with the text at hand.

Even though both fatic and conversational implicatures relate to circuitousness in human communication, they have divergent viewpoints. Fatic implicatures mostly focus on conventional forms, which are used to express different deliverables of language and the fact that each conventionalised form can perform various deeds in different contexts. Conversational implicatures, on the other hand, emphasise our ability to depart from predictability and still mean much more than what we actually utter. The illusive extra information thus becomes part and parcel of the collective comprehension of different contexts, regardless of the sum of meaning of individual meaning constituents.

In order for this to be fully fathomed, these cultural concerns should be combined with the contextual environment at hand. For example, the answer to the question "Are you a nurse?" can plausibly result in both "Yes, I am" and "No, I'm not" by the same person depending on the context and spatial circumstances. Consider the following two scenarios:

S1: The person asking the question has trouble finding his way in complicated hospital corridors poses the question to another person (who indeed is a nurse employed in the hospital):

Q: Are you a nurse?

And gets the only possible answer:

A: Yes, I am.

S2: The person asking the question has trouble finding his way in complicated hospital corridors poses the question to another person (who indeed is a nurse,

but not in that particular hospital. This time she is there for the first time, as a patient).

Q: Are you a nurse?

A1: No, I'm not (plausible).

A2: Yes, I am (plausible).

This example goes to show that contextual setting may not necessarily be a matter of *tertium comparationis* positioned in the natural equivalence translation theory paradigm. It no longer matters whether they represent “a material phenomenon”, consisting of “things, people, behavior, or emotion” (Goodenough 1964, 39-40). Instead, they ought to be looked at as an organisation of numerous social elements. It is this organisation of elements that people have in mind, their methods for perceiving, relating, and ultimately comprehending them. In this way, the capacity to deal with implicated messages is incumbent upon the supposition that the speaker is supportive and invites the listener to observe contextual elements to figure out the intended conversational implicatures. This, in return, can be a rewarding footing for the translator of implicatures to base his or her approach upon. One might also recall Sperber and Wilson's (1986) views that this discerning ability stems from the broad assumption that everything that is generated in the course of human conversation is pertinent to a certain extent; consequently implying that the listener deploys an array of cognitive skills to process the statement bearing in mind the circumstantial landscape and, as a result, considers them significant, echoing Nida's belief (1994, 157) that words only have meaning in terms of the culture in which they are used, and although languages do not determine culture, they certainly tend to reflect a society's beliefs and practices.

If the purport of an utterance is too irrelevant, the listener will ask for an explanation or explicature such as ‘What do you mean?’ or ‘I don't understand you.’ This is extremely relevant for the translatorial process because translators need to be utterly alert and cognisant of ‘portents’ in which implicit messages are carried by proxy, conversational implicatures. It is the combination of things that people say, do and act that shapes both their expressiveness and reception. If everything else is the same, what is conversationally implicated in the source language is supposed to retain its implication in the target language. This entails that there should be a certain level of concurrence between interlocutors in the given culture to absorb a new notion, creed, disposition, custom, ethics, routine, sentiment, and similar.

It is this concurrence that perhaps estranges any effort to present any new views, emotions, dispositions which do not comply with society's shared imageries.

3. Neglect of doctrines

No language is immune to violating the maxim of quality by invoking the faculty of metaphor, thus conversationally involving the matrimonial interpretation. Some of the more prominent translators, such as Hutchins, Kenny, Seleskovic and Gutt (1991), respectively have put forth different strategies. While the first two hold that translation ought to retain the conversational implicature by using the same metaphor, the second two see metaphor as mere communicative device, and the translator should be allowed to substitute a transferred meaning with a literal one. If we take into consideration Katan's (1999, 26) views, in which he describes culture as a "shared mental model or map" for interpreting reality and organising world experience, we might find a match in the seemingly divergent concepts. His view in the 'cultural considerations and translation model of the world', imply that it is a "system of congruent and interrelated beliefs, values, strategies and cognitive environments which guide the shared basis of behavior". The rest of the cited authors maintain that translation would have been more effective if it had preserved the conversational implicature by deploying the same metaphor in English.

This can be further illustrated by phraseological examples such as 'The early bird catches the worm' in English and 'Ko prvi djevojci, njegova djevojka' in Serbian whereby the speaker of the original utterance breaches the maxim of quality, and instead of being up to the point, he chooses to use a metaphor in order to convey the message with a more expressive charge, thereby giving rise to a conversational implicature. This conversational implicature stems from the circumvention of the literal expression of gaining an upper hand by those who act early, and putting forth a transferred meaning wording instead. In such a case, the translator has to be diligent in finding an adequate substitution in the target language as well, with the same amount of conversational implicature without undercutting the communicative import of the original text (Farghal 2012, 46).

In this case the translator or interpreter seeks an ideational equivalent, that is, an equivalent that focuses on "the idea of the SL text independently of the form or function", thereby observing the quality maxim (ibid., 47), even if it does not reflect the same implicature to a full extent. If the translator opts to replace the metaphor of the SL text with a literal expression in the TL text (such as "Those who come first

will get a better deal') the conversational implicature would be made away with, thereby reducing the expressiveness of the sentence to a minimum.

This asymmetry can be further complicated if one introduces another possible metaphoric translation in Serbian, namely 'Ko rano rani, dvije sreće grabi'. Both translations converge their meaning to the same purport, but the situations in which either of them would be used differ significantly. Notwithstanding the meaning equivalence, in order to use them in appropriate situations, the translator needs to be intimately familiar with cultural contexts, street jargon and expressive measures. Overlooking this facet would render translation less creative and aesthetic than the original. Ideally, translation renderings would comply with the TL norms while preserving the conversational implicature. In this example, both languages, English and Serbian, linguistically conceptualise and deploy such a collective experience in a similar way; implying that additional effort needs to be invested as a literal translation would not be satisfactory.

In many cases, however, the translator has no choice but to translate a phrase in a roundabout way. Take for example the phrase 'I have a bigger fish to fry'. No matter how diligent the translator, the target language simply has no metaphorical equivalent to offer and a more literal rendering (such as 'Imam preča posla') needs to be used. Such an asymmetry in metaphorical phrasing leads to an asymmetry in conversation implicature – it being rather minuscule in the latter case.

This can be acceptable for as long as the translator is not cognitively blind to metaphorical purports and for as long as there is indeed no metaphorical equivalent to be found. In some extreme cases, the translator's over-familiarity with the source language leads him or her to erroneously use the first metaphorical chunk that comes to mind overlooking the possible misconstrual by the target audience.

3.1 To breach or not to breach

Balancing between the two ends (translating literally or deploying a misleading phraseologism), it would appear that the first one is more on the safe side, that is, for as long as phraseological blindness, as in the case of the translation of title of the British film, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* rendered in Serbian as *Dve čađave dvocevke* does not rear its bizarre head. It is a good example of a failed observance of the phraseological content in the ST, which is totally absent in the TT. Besides, this stern mishap in translating the intended illocution has distorted the wit of the original formulation, thus violating the maxim of quality equilibrium.

Similarly essential is the translator's attentiveness upon encountering the maxim of quantity in which the text is deliberately shaped to be underinformative or

overinformative for communicative reasons. The use of customs of different cultures does not typically afford itself to literal translation, except where a serendipitous coincidence arises between the source language culture (SLC) and the target language culture (TLC). In certain instances, forsaking the maxim of quantity is such an easy and attractive way out from a semantic conundrum, that the translator unconsciously embraces literalness at the expense of conversational implicature in the TT. Sometimes, however, the use of literal translation would fall short of achieving the intended metaphorical interpretation and would remain within the constraints of literalness. Take for example the expression ‘It’s water off a duck’s back’ meaning that ‘one is not affected by a certain event or unfolding of a situation’ and the impossibility to translate it literally in Serbian.

In this case, ignoring the maxim of manner can be utterly perplexing in translation as there can hardly be any situation in which jousting or vagueness in the method of articulating a message would concur between languages, particularly in genealogically divergent groups of Indo-European languages such as Serbian and English. If the translator opts to insert a different phraseologism, it will give rise to competing conversational implicatures as they might mislead the reader into a different train of thought. The translator, however, might opt to use an expression that to some extent deviates from literary norms and shape the translation into ‘Šta se to mene tiče’ or ‘To se mene ne dotiče’ etc, which, truth to be told, do not sound perfectly literal in Serbian, and as such do carry a certain expressive load, but still fall short of deploying a metaphor.

It would be impossible to convey the message in the example above without capitalising on the wordplay. The translator would thus have to render the message autonomously, notwithstanding the violation of the maxim of manner chosen by the text originator to enhance the effect of their product. Thus, sometimes, in their attempt to limit the forfeiture of the manner maxim, translators reluctantly accept a blurred version of disjointed literalness. This may sound like creating a polar opposition between foreignising and domesticating cultures which need to be reconciled in a way that ensures unambiguousness while not undermining the imbedded cultural elements or, to go back to English and Serbian phraseologisms, coming up with a solution in which ‘the wolf does not die and the sheep do not perish’ translated as ‘I vuk sit, i ovce na broju’.

A possible mismatch in translatorial expressiveness, however, need not arise from infringing on the maxim of manner. There can simply be a word in a source language that does not have an equivalent in the target language. The reasons for its existence in the source language or lack thereof in the target language notwithstanding, the

difficulty will emerge in full display nevertheless. It may happen in both literary and technical circumstances and situations. The current political turmoil in the American administration and the efforts to delegitimise the current presidency have put the word 'impeachment' on the front pages of numerous media. Translators initially hesitated to transpose it as such in Serbian reports, and used the lengthening and dilution translation strategies to translate it as 'smjena predsjednika' ili 'opoziv predsjednika', but, as time went by, and the use of the words persisted in the American political discourse, the cumbersome 'impičment' borrowing is no longer that uncommon. How long will it take before the borrowed word is actually applied in our political discourse is anyone's guess, but those who bet on the shorter period seem to be spot on. It is not just lack of creativeness on the part of some translators that leads to such egregious transpositions. Political analysts and pundits have a hand in too. One could just recall how easily the syntagm 'vlast i opzicija' morphed into 'pozicija i opozicija'. This severely foreignised translation does not only cripple the target text in terms of cultural transfer, but it also distorts the consistency of the translation as it does not cogently fit within the cultural implicatures. One should be aware, nevertheless, that while the cultural misfortune in the rendering of the original terms cannot be fully ascertained because it deviates significantly from the intended cultural dispatch, the ultimate touchstone of translation is its *skopos*, which can serve as a consolation while giving priority to 'adequacy' over 'acceptability'.

With metaphorical meaning however, the translator needs to become an inherent insider in the source language culture, which would enable him or her to parse expressions correctly within its own culture, and then subsequently function as an insider in the target language culture to make it possible for him or her to offset the metaphorical value. Here, one must wonder what happens to the culture-based element which operates as an important semantic feature in the source language.

4. Conclusion

In order to preserve the ingenuity and aesthetics of the source text, it is not enough to convey the implicatures unequivocally whereby an infringement of any of Paul Grice's maxims is altered into compliance with a conversational norm. In this respect, one should distinguish between implicit information and implicit meaning (Larson: 1984), which in a conventionalised speech may converge or diverge between languages. Likewise, utmost attention should be paid to the choice between a semantic and a pragmatic representation of the text. In other words,

when they diverge, they may advance themselves to both a semantic and a pragmatic handling of the subject to their potential pellucidity and adequacy in the target language. In the case of the two languages that this paper juxtaposes, an appropriate treatment of conversational acts between English and Serbian is an essential aspect of translation activity. While a semantic handling of a text necessitates imaginative solutions to safeguard adequacy and potential acceptability in the target text, every pragmatic method ought to rely on thorough knowledge of conventionalised conversational norms in the target language to ensure suitability.

Preservation of interpersonal facets in culturally charged metaphorical expressions enhances the emotional tenor of speech and makes the dialogue more comprehensible. It should be observed here that typically there are several ways in both SL and TL that can render implicatures with greater or smaller loads of expressiveness. As translation is never a clear cut form, the translator weighs which element should be given preponderance when capturing the intended *skopos* of an utterance without undercutting other aspects of intended communication.

It would transpire from this that the context of a conversational act plays a key role in the translator's choice, for, if the semantic translation is not reinforced sufficiently by the context, it needs to be forsaken in favour of a pragmatic rendering. Before making the final choice, translators need to explore similar expressions in the target language in order to select one that achieves the same amount of expressiveness without jeopardising the integrity of the text. If the translator wants to maintain the expressive stratification of a particular expression in English, he or she needs to pursue a wordplay in Serbian that would come close to the proposed wordplay in English.

It takes a certain amount of coincidence to occur in order for two phraseological or metaphorical expressions to match both lexically and semantically in two genealogically divergent languages. More frequently though, translators are intermediaries in negotiations between expressiveness and literalness. In order for a translator to boldly pursue the expressiveness path, he or she must be genuinely positive that they have considered all the implications and implicatures that such a ploy carries along. Translating *rakija* as *brandy* is not a perfect match, but at least no one will be offended. Translating *It's all Greek to me* as *To su za mene Španska sela* again seems not to give rise to any cultural offence. Translating *When in Rome do as the Romans do* as *Kud svi Turci, tud i mali Mujo*, however, cannot be viewed through the same optics as there is a potential for cultural implicature depending on the history of the TL culture. In a culture which had a conflict with the Ottoman empire, such a rendering might invoke a negative connotation. In other cultures, however,

which had no historic antagonism with it, such a translatorial substitution might be regarded as connotation-free and, as such, perfectly acceptable. This reinforces the notion of the need for translator's absolute confidence in their familiarity with both cultures before they embark on a meaning compensation strategy.

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JEZIČKI ZNAK U KULTUROLOŠKOM RASKORAKU – PREVOĐENJE I UTICAJI

Rezime

Britanski lingvist i filozof Pol Grajs u svom uticajnom naučnom radu *Logika i konverzacija* (1975) dokazao je da rezonovanje i intelektualne sposobnosti omogućuju čovjeku da na obavezujući način uspješno generiše i tumači poruke koje se odašilju uz konverzacione implikature. Ukoliko bi se prevodioci striktno pridržavali takve doktrine, iz toga bi proizišlo da svako slovo na papiru ima nekoliko slojeva dubljih značenja skrivenih od površnog razmatranja koje bi morali da uzmu o obzir. Tekst tada postaje palimpsest namijenjenih poruka, od kojih svaka sadrži mnogobrojne implikature. U takvom sazivu značenja, prevodilac se uzdiže do visoko pozicioniranog suca, pri čemu je prinuđen da neka od njih prepusti zaboravu, dok drugima pridaje presudni značaj. Upravo je ta dihotomija u procesu prevođenja predmet razmatranja ovog rada, pri čemu se za opšta pitanja predoča-

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va širi teoretski osnov, dok se za specifične manifestacije date problematike koriste primjeri iz dva predmetna jezika: engleskog i srpskog.

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