IDEOLOGY AND TRANSLATION

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Abstract: Ignored until recently and therefore relatively undocumented, the manifestation of ideology in the process of translation has become an increasingly important issue in translation studies. After discussing several definitions of ideology as related to language and giving a short overview of the translations theories dealing with it, the paper focuses on two translation situations, i.e. conference interpreting of European institutional discourse and ad-hoc interpreting as practiced in Romania of "behind the Iron Curtain", meant to illustrate how ideology can affect the "rewriting" of the source text.

Key Words: translation, ideology, axiology, conference/ad-hoc interpretation

1. Introduction

Ignored until recently and therefore relatively undocumented, the manifestation of ideology in the process of translation has become an increasingly important issue in translation studies. This particular interest can be accounted for by a rather extensive research in the field of what could be described as "ideologized" language and by a more comprehensive and finely shaded definition of ideology.

Results of such research will be here related to my personal experience as ad/hoc interpreter in Romania "behind the Iron Curtain" with a view to assessing how "ideological" a translation can be.

2. Definition of ideology

2.1. The "innocent" meaning

There is a very general definition of ideology describing it as almost synonymous with culture. Ideology is thus "a systematic scheme or coordinated body of ideas or concepts, especially about human life and culture, a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group or culture." (Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1993).

In this very broad and apparently innocent meaning, ideology is mainly dealt with in translation studies focused on literary and religious texts. Thus, Henri Meschonnic in his *Pour la poétique* II (1973) argues that the translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek and then Latin impregnated it with Christian "ideology" by the mere fact of transposing paratax into syntax.

Antoine Berman, in this same line of thought, speaks about *ethnocentric* translations which impose target language cultural values and ideologies on source language cultures. The Ancient Roman culture and the classical French culture are

striking examples of such imperialistic cultural entities which manifest strong tendencies towards annexing or *reterritorializing* foreign cultures (Brisset, 2000).

Such views point to a strongly negative connotation. Even when defined as a main cultural component ideology appears to be a manifestation of power.

2.2 Socially oriented concepts

When related to society, group interests, political power and dominance, ideology acquires a fully negative meaning. This is, to a great extent, accounted for by the traditional Marxist ideology which largely contributed to a negative understanding of the concept, defined as "a form of cognitive distortion, a false or illusionary representation of the real" (M. Gardiner apud Beaton, 2007: 272).

In this purely negative meaning, ideology is most commonly used to refer to "others" not to "ourselves". As van Dijk (apud Munday 2007:196) says: "few of «us» (in the West or elsewhere) describe our own belief systems or convictions as «ideologies». On the contrary, Ours is the Truth, Theirs is the Ideology."

Ideologies as sets of values and interests shared by a group are therefore rejected not necessarily because they are false – Marxism, for instance, is still attractive to many Western people – but mainly because they are imposed by majority voting in democratic societies, by force in totalitarian regimes or, in more recent times, by manipulative mass-media. When we reject ideology, we actually reject the idea of power, dominance, manipulation and subsequent inequality and subordination.

3. Ideology and axiology

It is common knowledge that, in any society at all times, there are several competing ideologies. One of them is, however, dominant and liable to affect the others and the society as a whole. "The question of dominance and the notion of dominant ideology are of particular interest in institutional settings", argues Beaton (2007: 273). In such settings ideology acts as "a set of discursive strategies for legitimizing a dominant power." (Eagleton apud M. Beaton, 2007: 273)

Viewed as closely connected with dominance and power, institutional ideology opposes, in principle, any individual set of values and beliefs. "There are no personal ideologies", says van Dijk (apud Beaton 2007: 274) and Grant (apud Beaton, 2007: 274) introduces the term *axiology* to describe such subjective ideological systems of individual values. Although based on subjectivity, axiology is defined as a "socially constituted evaluation" (ibid: 274).

The interaction between ideology and axiology has become a matter of particular interest in translation studies since in translation mediated communication, the third actor, i.e. the translator/interpreter is presumed to have a higher degree of self-expression freedom in relation to the two speakers, bound to stick to an "ideology".

In his study "Interpreted Ideologies in Institutional Discourse", M. Beaton (2007) attempts to identify the type of relation between the dominant institutional ideology of

the European Union and various axiologies as manifested in the interpreting performances of five conference interpreters.

The analysis focused on two textual characteristics: lexical repetition and the use of metaphor strings. Assessing the "ideologizing" value of these features, Beaton (idem: 277) says: "In constantly referring to the institution of European Union, the institution itself is stabilized and functions as a self-referential, semi-closed system. *This self-referentiality strengthens ideological stabilization* within the institution. Institutional self-reference can be clearly seen in the *myriad of metaphors* used to refer to the European Union and the process of European integration. By constantly thematizing and referring to the institution, a given debate *stabilizes* the institution of the EU and allows to drive itself forward." (emphasis added). It is perhaps of some interest to notice that Beaton's obvious admiration of the European institutional discourse is a symptom of "ideological" contamination!

The five axiologies scrutinized by Beaton were found to be in full agreement with the dominant ideology, i.e. the five German interpreters proved to be firmly attached to the European values.

4. Translator's Choice

Following Beaton's line of demonstration, most professional translators/interpreters living in totalitarian systems could be expected to share their commissioners' / employers' ideologies. Which might not be the case!

Beaton's comparative analysis cannot actually account for any personal ideology/axiology. It does not reveal axiological features, it simply points to professional competence. The fact that the five interpreters performed similarly by faithfully translating institutional texts can only speak of their high level of translation expertise.

The five interpreters chose a certain method of translation – faithful/semantic in this case – taking into account their commissioner's requirements, the type of text to be translated – a text mainly displaying the persuasive functions, the type of translation i.e. conference interpretation. Their lexico-grammatical choices are thus not indicative of their ideologies / axiologies.

Although irrelevant in the translation situation evoked by Beaton, axiology may, in some other translational contexts, account for the translator's choices. Such an instance is the ad-hoc interpreting. Ad-hoc interpreting in contrast with conference interpreting, allows a less formal approach and gives the translator more freedom of self-expression. This is an instance of mediated communication based on less structured a more spontaneous speech which "invites" the interpreters to be spontaneous as well. The interpreter is also less constrained by time being thus able to better and more creatively process meaning. In such situations speaker and interpreter address relatively small audiences, which is another factor of stress relief on both sides.

As an ad-hoc interpreter in communist times I often managed to "humanize" ideological discourse by depriving it of its "key-features", i.e. repetitions, excessive use of dead metaphors (stereotypes) and of impersonal patterns such as, *s-a realizat, s-a obținut, s-a decis* etc. meant to conceal the subject / the doer / the individual.

An apparently innocent stereotype such as *oamnenii muncii de la oraşe şi sate* actually evoked a hideous reality: a whole people – both urban and rural inhabitants – fully pauperized and made dependent on the state support, and an unacceptable human condition, men (oamenii) seen as "attributes" of work (muncii). "Ideologically" neutralized, this phrase might become, in English, depending on the context, *the Romanian working people* or simply *the Romanians*.

Used unwittingly at the beginning that practice of "amending" source texts became in time conscious and systematic.

5. Conclusion

The translator can in some few strongly communicative translation situations, i.e. less formal, encouraging self-expression, "rewrite" the source text in the light of his/her personal ideology/axiology.

This can be viewed as a manipulation – happily this is called *axiology* nowadays – but this is not however the manipulation preached by the School of Manipulation (see Snell-Hornby, 1998) since this does not affect the explicit semantic content and function of the source text.

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