

THE TRANSLATOR – AT THE CROSSROAD OF TWO CULTURES

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The definition of *translation* concept has been dominated by numerous debates concerning its status as *art*, *craft*, or *science*. Some scholars, such as Th.Savory (1975), defined translation as an *art*, others, such as E.Jakobsen (1958), defined it as a *craft*, whereas others, such as Nida (1964), described it as a *science*. In other words, the translator shall approach the translation from a scientific point of view, trying to accomplish an objective description of the phenomenon. A common definition of the translation process, such as that provided by E. Nida (1964) emphasizes the idea that meaning is to be given priority, for, in translating, it is the content of the message which is of prime importance; although, style is secondary to content, it is nevertheless important.

The meaning of the message becomes clear when viewed in the broad frame of the cultural thought and behavioural structures of the receptors. In other words, when one proceeds from the level of words, one is obliged to interpret the meaning of the linguistic units in the light of the cultural context. Since the words are fundamental symbols for the features of culture, the translator, a mediator between two languages and cultures, should know the cultural contexts of both languages so that he should employ in the target language words which designate „the closest equivalence”. Therefore, the translator should have a keen insight into two different cultural contexts. The translator, who participates in more than one cultural world, plays a dual role: as a *receptor* of the source language message and as a *source* of the receptor language message. Any deviation from the function of objective mediator of the two languages and cultures involved, entails a disturbance of the message and a distortion of the interlingual and intercultural communication. Therefore, the translator’s task of mediating between the two cultures is a highly complex one. He is expected, above all, to recognize and reduce cultural differences for they lead to more serious mistakes than those involving linguistic structures. Consequently, the demands made on a good translator are numerous, including: complete knowledge of the two languages involved, a high degree of biculturalism, experience in language switching, facility of expression, etc.

Since the translation and to the translator’s task presupposes the reproduction in the target language of the closest natural equivalent of the content and form of the source language message, we would underline that in order to do it, the translator should preserve all the formal correspondences which are equivalent in meaning. It should be noted that the equivalent should be a *natural equivalent*, which means that the message is to be translated into the idiomatic everyday target language. In *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Nida and Taber suggests that translating must first and foremost aim at reproducing the message; for this purpose, the translator must make a number of grammatical and lexical adjustments.

- idioms shall not be translated literally but meaningfully:

„De te-ar împinge păcatul să mai vii odată, vai de steaua ta o să fie!” (I. Creangă, *Amintiri din copilărie*) = Should your evil star prompt you to come again, you'll rue the day when you were born.

„ – la poftim de încălecă pe Bălan, jupâneasă! zise părintele de tot posomorât, să facem Sfântului Nicolai cel din cuiu. (...) Și Smărăndița a mâncat papara și pe urmă ședea cu mâinile la ochi și plângea ca o mireasă, de sărea cămeșa de pe dânsa.” (I. Creangă, *Amintiri din copilărie*) = Just come out here, young lady, and mount Dapple-Grey, said the priest, now quite sternly and let us put St. Nicholas, who's hanging from the nail up there, to his proper business! (...) And little Smaranda got a good hiding and afterwards sat crying into her cupped hands like a bride, so that the very blouse shook on her back.

„Din partea tatei, care adesea îmi zicea în bătaie de joc: „Logofete, brânza-n cui, lapte acru-n călimări, chiu și vai prin buzunări!”, puteam să rămân Nic-a lui Ștefan a Petrei. Vorba ceea: „Decât codaș în oraș / mai bine-n satul tău fruntaș!” (I. Creangă, *Amintiri din copilărie*) = As for my father, he would often tease me: „Scriver, no cheese for you, inkhorn full of milk that's sour, moil and woe your pockets dower; if he had had his way I might well have stayed where I was well off, like Nică, Ștefan's son and Petre's grandson! As the saying goes: Better a big fish in a little pond, than a small tiddler in the ocean.”

- Although the passive voice exists in both Romanian and English, the following example shows that such a correspondence cannot be always preserved:

„Până nu se vor obține informații suplimentare pentru analiză, nu este indicat să se tragă concluzii din aceste cifre.” = Until further information can be obtained for analysis, it would be unwise to draw any conclusions from these figures.

The definition under consideration also implies that the translator must strive for equivalence rather than identity, which is just another way of emphasizing that the reproduction of the message is more important than the preservation of the form. In the following example, the aim of the Romanian into English translator having been to reproduce the message, the preservation of the form of the source language message has been of minor importance.

„În România, vă așteaptă zeci de locuri pitorești de o frumusețe inegalabilă. De pildă, litoralul românesc al Mării Negre: o climă agreabilă, o vegetație odihnitoare, o plajă largă orientată spre răsărit care înaintează lin în mare, totul scăldat de un soare generos de la primele ore ale dimineții până târziu la asfințit.” = Scores of matchless beauty spots are awaiting your arrival in Romania. Take, for instance, the Black Sea Coast with its glooming climate and a vegetation restful to the eye, with a widespread east-facing beach sloping gently into the sea while basking in generous sunshine from sunrise till sunset.

Note that for „zeci de locuri pitorești de o frumusețe inegalabilă”, the translator employs „Scores of matchless beauty spots”; „your arrival” – has been added as it was implicit in the source language text; „vegetație odihnitoare” – has been redered as „vegetation restful to the eye” in order to avoid the possible negative connotation of the structure „restful vegetation”; *de la primele ore ale dimineții până târziu la asfințit* – has been translated as „from sunrise til sunset”, based on alliteration which is more expressive.

The examples provided so far have also shown that in „the closest natural equivalent”, the term „equivalent” points to the source language message, „natural” to the target language and „closest” binds together the two orientations or methods of translating (formal equivalence or corespondence and dynamic equivalence) on the highest degree of approximation. From the above discussion, it emerges clearly that the translator is constantly faced with a series of polar distinctions which oblige him

to choose content as opposed to form; the closest equivalence as opposed to any equivalence; naturalness as opposed to formal correspondence.

In order to help translators choose meaningfully between the above mentioned opposing sets of defining features as well as to show them what should be done in specific instances, Nida and Taber have established certain fundamental guiding criteria which reflect different perspectives of form and comprehensibility. From among them, I have chosen those which, in our view, may help the Romanian -to-English translators:

- a. Contextual consistency has priority over verbal consistency, viewing a translation in terms of its linguistic forms.
- b. Dynamic equivalence has priority over formal correspondence, being based on the reactions or responses of the receptors and viewing translation work from the perspective of comprehensibility.

Contextual consistency relies on the following facts: since 1. words cover areas of meaning and since 2. in different languages, the semantic areas of corresponding words are not identical, the choice of the right word in the target language for a word in the source language text depends more on the context than upon a fixed system of verbal consistency. That means that one should translate a word and expression by that word and expression which is most appropriate in each context, rather than by the same word or expression in all contexts. At this point, Nida and Taber specify that contextual consistency is one aspect of dynamic equivalence. Therefore, the concept of dynamic equivalence points to the fact that a translator frequently changes the form in order to preserve the meaning, thus following the principle of contextual consistency, he will render the message of the original text in the target language in such a way that the response of the receptors of the translated text will be similar to that of the original receptors. The following example illustrates the correctness of the above mentioned priority:

„În acest context, fără îndoială, largul profil al celei mai importante manifestări expoziționale internaționale bucureștene conferă premise favorabile unor contacte directe între specialiști și oameni de afaceri”; = No doubt, against this background, the congress of the most outstanding of Bucharest's international fairs offer great opportunities for establishing direct contacts between experts and businessmen.

In the above example, the word „profil” has been translated by the most appropriate word in each context.

However, words are not the only formal features involved in formal consistency: one may have formal consistency of word-order (the most difficult to retain in a translation), as well as of phrase and clause order, and they must often be changed as the following examples will plainly show:

„Nu se poate evita acest pericol”. = This danger is unavoidable. (note the word-order)
„La reuniunea de înființare a institutului, au luat parte personalități marcante ale vieții politice”. = The participants in the meeting for the setting up of the Institute were distinguished personalities of political life. (note the word-order)
„Stressul și reumatismul, bolile inimii și ficatului sunt tratate pe tot mapamondul cu pastile. Pe toate meridianele globului este semnalat și condamnat abuzul de medicamente. Chimia sofisticată a împins în anonimat un mijloc de alinare a suferințelor cunoscut și folosit de mii de ani - apele minerale”. = It is a pity that mineral waters, which have been a means for alleviating human suffering for thousands of years, have sunk into oblivion, being replaced by ever more sophisticated chemicals. For it is a matter of common

knowledge that nowadays diseases of every kind, whether stress or rheumatism, heart or liver complaints, are treated with pills the world over, and everywhere people make excessive use of medical drugs.

In addition, the problem of formal consistency also arises in terms of *sentence length* for one cannot mechanically reproduce the length of sentences from the source language into the target language.

Consider the following example:

Ex: „Iată-ne ajunși în apogeul deschiderii celei de-a 15-a ediții a Târgului Internațional București, care-mi oferă plăcuta ocazie să vă adresez din partea organizatorilor un călduros bun venit”. = It is a great pleasure for us to be here with you on the eve of the opening of Bucharest International Fair, and we heartily welcome you on behalf of the organizers.

There is also formal consistency in terms of classes of words when nouns are translated by nouns, verbs by verbs, etc. If one insists on translating in such terms, the message may be distorted, hence the word classes must be changed, if necessary, as illustrated by the following examples:

„Tribunalul își are sediul la Haga”. = The Court *sits* in the Hague.

„Creșterea rolului Națiunilor Unite este o preocupare constantă a țărilor în curs de dezvoltare”. = To have the United Nations play a greater role, has been a permanent concern of the developing countries.

Dynamic equivalence implies that translations are viewed in terms of the receptors rather than of their respective forms, the comprehensibility of the translation being primarily judged in terms of the total impact the message has on the respective receptors.

Communication is not only informative, it is also expressive, emotive, imperative and phatic. Therefore, if a translation is to serve the basic functions of communication then, its functions may be:

- It must provide information which the receptors can fully understand (*informative function*);
- It must present the message in such a way that the receptors can feel its relevance (*expressive function*);
- It must produce a clear and explicit message so that it may have a real impact on the receptors (*the imperative function*)

Now, we shall take them in turn:

A. *Correct communication of information*, affected by or thoroughly understandable translation.

„Descoperirile arheologice confirmă viața economică, socială și politică proprie a Dacilor pe întreg teritoriul României în urmele puternicilor așezări ale înfloritoarei cetăți dacice a lui Decebal pot și azi fi văzute și admirate la Deva, în Munții Orăștie ai Transilvaniei”. = Archaeological findings have ascertained that the Dacians had an economic, social and political life of their own throughout the territory Romania occupies today, and the vestiges of the mighty settlements of Decebalus' flourishing age may still be viewed by admiring tourists at Deva, in the Orăștie Mountains of Transylvania.

In this example „urme” has been rendered by „vestige”, for „puternice așezări” the translator employs *the mighty settlements*, while „tourists”, only implicit in the source language text, has been added for the sake of clarity.

B. *The expressive factor* , for the receptors must also feel as well as understand what is said.

„În ciuda vârstei sale, atestată documentar de peste 500 ani, Bucureștiul este un oraș mereu tânăr”.= Although Bucharest is five hundred years old, as documents testify, it has always moved with the times”

C. *Emphasis on the imperative factor.*

„De aceea sper că toți participanții își vor îndrepta atenția...”= I hope, therefore, that all participants in this meeting will focus their attention on...”.

When engaging in translation work, the translator should, above all, know exactly what type of translation he is to produce i.e. whether he is to follow as closely as possible the structure in the source language, in words and grammar, or he is to try to express the meaning in the source language text in such a manner that the receptor of the translated text should respond to it very much like the original receptors. This specification has brought us closer to formal equivalence (source-oriented) and dynamic equivalence (receptor-oriented), the two types of equivalence aimed at, the two methods or orientations taken up in translating.

Now, we shall set side by side a formal-equivalence translation and a dynamic-equivalence translation of the same Romanian text in order to note the differences:

Ex: *Aprecieri că o cerință fundamentală a zilelor noastre este trecerea la măsuri concrete de dezarmare generală și, în primul rând la dezarmare nucleară.*

<i>Formal equivalence</i>	<i>Dynamic equivalence</i>
We appreciate that a fundamental requirement of our days is <i>the passing</i> to concrete measures of general disarmament, and in the place of nuclear disarmament.	We consider it a fundamental necessity of our times that <i>a switch over</i> be made to practical measures of general disarmament, and priority of nuclear disarmament.

Ex: *Progresul, pacea și securitatea în zilele noastre sunt nemijlocit legate de lupta pentru lichidarea subdezvoltării, etc.*

<i>Formal equivalence</i>	<i>Dynamic equivalence</i>
Progress, peace and security in our days are <i>directly</i> linked with the fight for the <i>liquidation</i> of underdevelopment.	In our days, progress, peace and security are <i>closely</i> bound up with the struggle for <i>eliminating</i> underdevelopment.

Whereas in the formal equivalence translation, there are clumsy structures because of the translator’s concentration on the source language text, the dynamic equivalence translation, in which the translator has had primarily the receptors and their response in the focus of attention, is a natural, fully clear and understandable message. As Nida points out, the choice of type of translation by the translator depends on the nature of the message, the purpose of the author and the translator and the type of audience.

To conclude with, translating is more than a compromise, it means a continuous balancing. Then translator’s task finally consists in weighing one factor against another but the result of his conscious work is sure to be a better translation than one in which all the above considerations have not been taken into account. What we need in the translation of Romanian texts is a text which speaks to the people employing the inner language of the heart.

References:

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