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## *Issues in Inter-cultural Translation*

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### **Faithfulness in Translation or *Les Belles Infideles***

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*The article is an attempt to shed light on a few aspects regarding the domain of translation and interpreting. We start from Jakobson and Nida's assumption that any text is in principle translatable, although modifications to the quantity and quality of information contained in the source text are possible. However, although we do not intend to provide recipes for translating, since translation is often a matter of experience and inspiration, we will focus on markedness relationships that convey meaningful information in the original text. We introduce two related principles, markedness and foregrounding, which may help identify those elements which render the original text significant. Moreover, in our demonstration we rely on Newmark's idea that a faithful or accurate translation must be first and foremost communicative rather than strictly semantically correct.*

The rapid expansion of information and communication technology during the past decade has created a large demand for translation of a wide range of more or less specialized materials. As a result, translators are confronted with an increased volume and speed of communication, which requires specialized knowledge of several disciplines, simultaneously with mastering more than two or three foreign languages. Moreover, due to the large demand of translation work, translators must also render texts in their second or third language. Thus, while a translator who possesses the adequate knowledge, experience and skills can translate relatively easily into his/her native language, when having to do what Newmark calls a "service translation", problems related to faithfulness and/or accuracy of translation may arise. He points out that

I shall assume that you, the reader, are learning to translate into your language of habitual use, since that is the only way you can translate naturally, accurately and with maximum effectiveness. In fact, however, most translators do translate out of their own language... (Newmark, 1995).

The task of producing a faithful and accurate translation into a second or third language is more difficult as the results tend to be rather mediocre and disappointing. Although linguistic knowledge of source language (SL) and target language (TL) is a basic prerequisite, being bilingual does not automatically make a translator. In addition, besides training, cultural background and skills a good translator possesses detailed and constantly updated knowledge of the subject, as well as competence to write clearly, economically and resourcefully in a target language (Newmark, 1995). Moreover, one has to identify the complex nuances of the source text and possess enough proficiency, experience and skill to render them into TL. The

task of the translator is to make his/her product comparable with the original both as information and expression. Simply put, a good translator must recreate the original with the means of TL. According to Benjamin, at the core of translation lies the concept of “universal language”, which is beyond the action of merely transposing words from one given language into a different idiom. In the same vein, Steiner (1975) points out that good translations indicate that the translator has perceived the “essential significance” of the original, whereas poor translations *communicate too much. Their seeming accuracy is limited to what is non-essential in the fabric of the original* (p. 63).

There are two major approaches regarding the problem of faithfulness in translation. One is centered on the intention of the author, and the other on the target audience and implicitly on the expectations of the reader vis-à-vis the translated text. The author-centered approach requires that the translator identify the ways in which the author seeks to attract the attention of the audience and convey the information provided by the message. Thus the translator is first of all a reader and semantic decoder. On the other hand, the reader-centered approach is closely linked to the concepts of relevance and acceptability. The original message must be conveyed in a way in which it communicates information and is also recognized and accepted by readers as a natural utterance. A translation that fails to fulfill the expectations of its targeted readers is not acceptable. For example, children’s literature does not use the words and expressions which occur in texts whose target readers are adults. The translator takes upon him/herself the task of rephrasing, rewriting and modulation, which are necessary in order to make the translation understood and accepted by its readers. This is why such concepts as markedness and foregrounding may help the translator identify the points in the source text which require special attention and judgment.

Markedness is based on the principle of opposition. It is closely linked with the distinctive feature analysis in phonology pioneered by Roman Jakobson. This theory emphasizes the importance of relations between elements in a structure. According to Jakobson, who regards oppositions as necessarily binary, one term of the opposition, the unmarked, provides more general information than the marked, which is more specific. Markedness relationships can be easily noticed in morphology, where certain paired grammatical categories, such as gender or number exhibit marked vs. unmarked features. Thus French, which distinguishes between masculine and feminine nouns is an example (Jakobson VIII:94). The pair “lion/lionne” (lion/lioness) is a typical example of unmarked/marked relation. The unmarked term, “lion”, besides denoting the male animal, is the generic term for the animal, whereas “lionne”, which is feminine, is more specific, being therefore “marked”.

In syntax markedness is manifest basically at the level of word order. Thus, in English the unmarked word order is SVO (e.g. *The man hit the ball*) and AN (e.g. *The red ball*), whereas in German it is SVO for main clauses and SOV in subordinate clauses. However, when one wishes to assign predominance to a certain feature, this unmarked word order can be modified with a marked, and more significant one. This was called by Halliday (1981) and Chafe (1972; 1976) *foregrounding* or *givenness*.

Foregrounding is a term which was first used by P. L. Garvin as a translation equivalent for the Czech “aktualisace”, used by several aestheticians of the Prague School. Foregrounding defines *the kind of deviation which has the function of bringing some item into*

*artistic emphasis so that it stands out from its surroundings* (Chapman, 1973: 48). Although initially meant as a tool for studying the “literariness”, that is, the features and modalities which distance an aesthetic message from ordinary communication, foregrounding has been extended to syntax and semantics. Although unsystematically, everyday speech, too, may use foregrounding in order to achieve or influence results. Foregrounding may bring to attention certain things in a message, such as the speaker’s attitude, status in society, or may help keeping communication channels open (adults’ social chatter or children’s endless and often meaningless talk). Literary language, on the other hand, makes more deliberate and systematic use of these devices. As the Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky puts it, the function of the literary image is not to explain a meaning, but to create a vision (Miall and Kuiken, 1994: 390).

Both literature and everyday communication bring to the foreground the information/expression which is deemed relevant by the speaker/author, leaving the irrelevant things in the background. This is done using marked elements in order to emphasize the relevant information. Chafe (1976) showed that, among other means, passivization of an active sentence is a means of foregrounding. If, for example, one transforms the ordinary *Tom kicked Harry* into the passive *Harry was kicked by Tom* or *Harry was kicked*, one has in fact turned an unmarked construction (active) in a marked one (passive), more or less with a goal in mind (e.g. to see Tom punished and/or place Harry in a position of victim). This is an instance of deliberate alteration of meaning of an utterance by means of foregrounding the “sufferer” and moving the “actant” in the background). As Stockwell (1977: 147) pointed out, language is an *optimal system of providing devices for foregrounding new information and backgrounding old [information]*. The foreground/background play is made possible by virtue of the dichotomy between code and message, where the code is the surface structure of the message, more precisely its form, whereas the message is the deep structure, or the contents.

Foregrounding is assigning a motivated prominence to the part of the message which the speaker wishes to focus (Halliday, 1981). Since the surface structure of the message presents itself as an accumulation of phonetic, morphologic and syntactic features, the rules of foregrounding manifest themselves at three levels. Focussing may occur through intonation, morphology and word order. In a sentence like *John likes music a lot*, the unmarked intonation assigns emphasis on *lot*. However, foregrounding effects can be obtained through assigning emphasis on *music* or *John*. Stockwell (1977: 157–58) enumerates several examples of foregrounding which are meant to shift the focus from the typical question of “who is doing what?” to a multitude of other ways of expression. They are such as cleft or pseudo-cleft constructions (*It’s music that John likes a lot* or *What John likes a lot is music*), object fronting constructions (*Early Mozart my quartet can play* vs. the unmarked *My quartet can play early Mozart*) passive constructions (discussed earlier) and adverb fronting constructions (*Tomorrow I must get down to serious work* vs. *I must get down to serious work tomorrow*).

Going back to markedness, at the semantic level it is reflected by the relationship between general and particular terms. To add up to the examples mentioned above, in the pair man/woman, “woman” is marked with respect to “man”, since it displays the feature [+female], which the more general term “man” lacks. Unmarkedness is a salient feature of “man”, since not only does it display the lack of a feature, but in some contexts it is used in a

way that makes the opposition man/woman irrelevant (e.g. “mankind”, a general term which covers both “man” and “woman”). Another example is the English word “nurse”. It can be used to refer to nurses of either gender. However, the term “male nurse” is more specific since it restrains the gender choice to [+ male] being therefore marked. As Battistella points out, *There is, of course, an obvious cultural explanation for this [...] in the social fact that nurses are most commonly female* (1990: 24).

Semantic markedness also includes pairs of antonyms such as good/bad, long/short, old/young, whose markedness features can be judged according to criteria of breadth of distribution, frequency and prototypicality. Thus “bad” is marked with respect to “good” since, prototypically speaking, our cognitive experience is more oriented towards “good” rather than “bad”. In the same vein, “young” is more restricted than “old”, therefore marked, since “old” may have a particular usage “he is as *old* as the mountains” (old=[− young]) and “my nephew is 6 years *old*” (old=[∅± young]).

Lack of mark has been often associated with attributes of “generality”, “prototypicality”, “normality”, “naturalness”, “frequency” etc. (Greenberg, 1966). The unmarked choice is considered to be the “normal” one. The problem which translators are confronted with is that the categorization of things into pluses and minuses may not be relevant or may differ from one culture to another. Moreover, these relationships are extremely sensitive to context, in the sense that what is generally accepted as the norm in one context (culture, social and political system, situation, etc.) may be denied as deviant in a different context. Jakobson (VIII: 93) gives a more or less linguistic example of such a modification in one slogan used by Russian Bolsheviks before and after coming to power. Thus the Bolshevik slogan *All those who are not against us are with us* can be considered a marked statement in a period when the Bolsheviks were striving for political power. However, when communism became a state policy after 1917 (the norm, *ergo* unmarked) the slogan reappeared in a new form, as *All those who are not with us are against us*. Discussing the context sensitiveness of markedness relationships, Aert Kuipers points out that a text written in white will stand out on a blackboard, but not on a white one (Battistella, 1990: 5).

How do these things apply to the domain of translation/interpretation? Faithfulness in translation from the point of view of markedness and foregrounding means that the translation should be literal enough to assign prominence to those elements as indicated in the original text, while at the same time free enough to avoid clumsy, unnatural expressions and turns of phrase which may divert the attention of the audience to a wrong direction. At first sight this may seem a facile task. However, languages pose such problems which make it extremely difficult to produce a perfectly accurate translation. Steiner argues that

Any model of communication is at the same time a model of translation, of a vertical or horizontal transfer of significance. No two historical epochs, no two social classes, no two localities use words and syntax to signify exactly the same things, to send identical signals of valuation and inference. Neither do two human beings (1975: 45).

Faithfulness to the target audience means to identify the ways to make the translated text relevant for a specific segment of readers. When rendering in French an (marked) expression like *It's raining cats and dogs*, a faithful translation approximates the meaning of the original, even if some of the original effect may be lost. Therefore, instead of the literal *Il pleut des*

*chats et des chiens*, which is a “faithful” but useless translation, unintelligible for the reader, the translator resorts to the closest (unmarked) corresponding equivalent in TL which is *Il pleut à verse*, which Catford (1965) calls “TL lexical normalization”. I would also add here a French idiomatic expression *Il pleut des cordes*, which may be a more inspired translation for the expression in discussion. “Normalization” in this context means to transform the deviant, and unintentionally marked translation of an ordinary English utterance into a normal French utterance.

Finally, I will exemplify the idea of faithfulness to the author and target audience with a passage from a story written by Ruth Ainsworth, and partially translated by Tobita (1997). Here is the original text in English:

There was once a little sparrow. He lived in a nest in the ivy on an old stone wall. He had four brothers and sisters. When he had grown some soft brown feathers and could move his wings up and down, his mother began to teach him to fly....

The first thing a translator must do, as Gerding-Salas (2000) points out, is to

define some essential starting-points for the (...) text to be translated, such as the author of the text, the aim of the text, the readership, and the standard to be used, for which it is important to identify and categorize the author, the message, the kind of discourse, the translator and the readership.

The story was written by a famous author of children’s literature, and narrates the adventures of a little sparrow. The narration is targeted at a specific segment of readers, therefore the style and language must be adapted in order to meet the expectations of the little readers. The rhythm and flow of the story lacks the speed and sophistication of literature which targets adult audiences. And here is one example of the translation Tobita had expected from his students:

- (1) 昔、一羽の小雀がいました。彼は古い石壁に這う蔦の中の巣に住んでいました。彼には四人の兄弟姉妹がいました……

This translation may be a product of anyone who has a minimal knowledge of English and Japanese. It is faithful to the words and grammar, rather than the style of the author and the expectations of the audience. Although Tobita’s translation is literal up to the point where he translates correctly “brothers and sisters” as “kyoudai shimai”, he adapts it in order to make it more syntactically correct. Instead of translating the sentence *He lived in a nest in the ivy on an old stone wall* as *karewa furui ishibabe no tsuta no naka no su ni/no naka ni kurashite imashita*, where the endless repetition would be too much even for a repetition loving Japanese, he chose to translate it as *He lived in a nest in the ivy which crept along an old stone wall* (Kare wa furui ishibabe ni hau tsuta no naka no su ni sundeimashita).

Tobita further discusses the translations produced by his students, which we will give below:

- (2) ちいさなすずめは、4わのおにいさんすずめとおねえさんすずめといっしょに、いしのかべのうえのつたのなかにある、おうちにすんでいました  
 (3) こすずめは、いしのかべのつたのかげのいえに、よにんのおにいさんとおねえさんとおかあさんと、いっしょにくらしていました

Both translations seem to take into account the “target reader” factor. They are both written

entirely in hiragana, and instead of rendering “brothers and sisters” as a correct but in this context unacceptable “kyodai shimai”, they both chose “oniisan (suzume) to onesan (suzume)”, which is a language children are likely to be more familiar with. Moreover, the word “nest” was replaced in translation with that which means “home” (ouchi/ie), which is again closer to the little readers’ understanding.

However, the two examples above lack the expected consistency and readability. T2 contains too many repetitions such of “suzume” and “no”. Moreover, the translator seems to hesitate between referring to the birds as “nin” (which goes for humans) or as “wa” (the prefix for birds). Finally, the translation lacks the introductory phrase or sentence which announces the beginning of a story.

T3 is also marred by the frequent repetition of “no” and “to” and by the lack of introduction.

Tobita further suggests two improved versions, a more general one for adult readers, where some of the Chinese characters contain the reading as well, and another one, for children, written in hiragana only. Here they are.

(4) (target readers: mothers)

小さなスズメさんがいました。古びた石のかべにはついているツタのなかに<sup>す</sup>巣があつて、そこにくらしていたのです。おにいさんやおねえさんも四にんいました……

(5) (target readers: children)

かわいい すずめのぼうやは、ふるい いしの かべにはついている つたのなかの おうちに すんでいました。このぼうやには おにいさんと おねえさんが よにん いました。

The differences between the two versions are easy to notice. Besides that, T4 is more faithful to the original than T5. Moreover, T4 can be considered a freer rendering than T1, because it brings elements which add up to the expressiveness and readability of the text. Let us analyze T1, T4 and T5 and point out the differences and the way in which these may affect the general impression of the translation.

T1	T4	T5
一羽の小雀	小さなスズメさん	かわいい すずめのぼうや
古い石壁	古びた石のかべ	ふるい いしの かべ
這う藨の中に	はついているツタのなかに	はついている つたのなかの
巣に住んでいました	<sup>す</sup> 巣があつて、そこにくらしていたのです	おうちに すんでいました
彼には		このぼうやには
四人の兄弟姉妹	おにいさんやおねえさんも四にん	おにいさんと おねえさんが よにん

Whereas T1 is a faithful and informative but rather uninspired translation of the original, in T4 and especially T5 efforts have been made to modulate and re-create the atmosphere of the story with a view to the virtual reader. Thus the distance from “一羽の小雀” to “かわいい すずめのぼうや” is considerable in that the former uses correct terms which are more frequent in adults’ written language and even in academic writing, whereas the latter is not what purists would call a translation equivalent for “little sparrow” (it means “a cute baby/kid

sparrow”). Also, the purely referential character of T1 does not allow for a closer proximity between the (virtual) story-teller and the (virtual) reader, whereas in T4 and T5, this proximity is considerable, which makes them if not more literally faithful, at least more acceptable in the given situation.

I would like to sum up this discussion pointing out that the concept of faithfulness in translation must not be dissociated from those of relevance and acceptability, and that markedness and foregrounding are useful tools for the identification of the nature of texts and their virtual readers and help to produce effective and meaningful translations.

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