

TRANSLATOR'S FAITHFULNESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC VIEW

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In this article the author's intention is to touch upon only *some* of the aspects characterizing translation as a sociolinguistic phenomenon relevant to translator's faithfulness. Reduction of the scope of analysis is due to the fact that the problem of relations between translatology and sociolinguistics is considerably more extensive and therefore requires more detailed research producing a quantitatively much bulkier text. An attempt will be made to provide a rather impressionistic contrastive analysis of translation problems appearing in certain pairs of sociolinguistic correlations, such as *source/target language and social group*, *source/target language and age group*, as well as *source/target language and gender*. In the last two correlation pairs (and episodically elsewhere) translator as a representative of a definite age-bound or gender-bound social group will also be viewed. This method of analysis has successfully been used by the author in his previous publications on the subject (Sīlis, 1999 and 2006), as well as repeatedly applied by the authoritative sociolinguist Peter Trudgill (2001).

The illustrative material used in the article comes from author's own observations of problem-solving cases in translation and interpreting practice cases where Latvian is either the source or the target language, and similar instances analysed in research publications of other Latvian translation theorists.

In the end of the discussion part the problem of *culture-specific discrepancies of the SL and TL nations*, reflected also in the difference of the respective culture of verbal expression, will also be tackled.

Translation/Interpreting and Sociolinguistics

Translation and interpreting is increasingly capturing the attention of sociolinguists, for not only linguists, but also representatives of other disciplines more and more often view the process of translation as a communicative act in a specific situational context. The problem becomes especially topical when the target language text readers are perceived as definite social, professional or culture-specific groups: here the concrete parameters of the addressee will undoubtedly pattern the perception of the translated or interpreted version. Being aware of the problem's importance a

professional interpreter and translator will strive to keep optimal functional adequacy of the source language (SL) and target language (TL) texts, simultaneously doing the utmost to modify the target text according to the specific character of the readers' circle. Modifications of this kind are most vividly displayed not only in advertising and promotion material, as well as in journalism (especially in political journalism), but also, although to a relatively lesser extent, in the so-called "technical texts", especially in the descriptions of certain products, technological processes etc., connected with attraction of investments, acquisition of new markets, creation of new transit corridors and new commodity flow directions – all kinds of processes where SL and TL are carriers of definite socio-cultural information in the broadest sense of the word.

Already more than thirty years ago J.C. Catford, undoubtedly a typical representative of the linguistic approach to translation theory, admits, that language is a way in which human beings interact in social situations, and that language-behaviour is manifested in some kind of bodily activity on the part of a *performer*, and presupposes the existence of at least one other human participant in the situation, an *addressee* (Catford, 1967, 1). *Performer* and *addressee* are "participant roles".

Production of a definite translated text most often is brought about by a client's order, and from time to time, by the initiative of the translator. Thus, SL and TL texts can be characterised as linguistic products of social nature, meant for definite "consumers" and produced in definite socio-economic conditions.

Moreover, admitting that translations are products often meant for representatives of concrete social, ethnic, gender and age groups, it would only be logical to extract the translators and interpreters as biological and social beings from the "swamp of anonymity", and show, for example, that translator's belonging to a definite age group and gender quite often is a factor that determines both translation strategy in concrete episodes, as well as the choice of lexis and style that seems appropriate to the translator.

Relations between Source/Target Language and Social Group in Translation

In a social context of this character translators and interpreters must find an optimal solution to the problems like terminologically and stylistically adequate reproduction of the specific language (sometimes ironically termed *red-tape*) used by most major international institutions (UN, EU etc.). The author of this article himself has several times been placed in rather stressful situations, when performing a consecutive interpreting of some executives of the European Commission. In these cases the orally produced ST largely seemed to be form without content – the EC senior civil servants traditionally are cautious not to take any sides. Speakers' sentences are outwardly extremely imposing and enormously complex, being almost impossible for memorizing and precise reproduction by the interpreter, and abounding with expressions like

- capacity development of the office;
- development of the sustainability of the programme;
- the project will utilize a multiplier system;
- promotion of attitudinal changes;

- we are very committed to the successful implementation of the project;
- the programme is designed to build national capacities;
- the project will provide operational delivery.

It is evident that in these cases, observed by the author and his colleagues-interpreters in the beginning of the 1990s, the speakers and the interpreters still belong to two different “administrative cultures” – the EU and the post-soviet one, each having its own set of professional slang items. (After Latvia’s accession to the European Union in 2004 these differences are rapidly disappearing because of the EU “administrative culture” is being taken over by the new member states.)

Difference of “administrative cultures” is also reflected in certain text types, e.g. in legal texts. There have been discussions in Latvia during the last 10–15 years concerning guidelines of translating foreign legal texts into Latvian. Thus, in 1995 Ieva Zauberga writes: “Compared to English Latvian legal language is much plainer. For some reasons, e.g. relatively late formation of the legal system, use of other languages (Russian) in law, the formal style has not taken deep root in the Latvian legal language. Consequently translations from English into Latvian in the first place perform the informative function while in Latvian-English translations much attention must be paid to the formal aspect of the target text.” (1995, 94).

Guided by his experience of a practicing translator and interpreter, the author of the present article cannot fully agree with a statement of this kind. As, for example, the Civil Law of the Republic of Latvia has been restored in its textual form of 1939, the opening paragraphs of all standard contracts are formulated in the Latvian characteristic for the thirties of the last century (language used some 80–90 years ago), but obsolete in the 21st century. Nevertheless, this particular “old-fashioned” language form should be retained in translating the concrete subtypes of legal documents relevant to it.

In this connection translato­logist and lawyer Valda Rudziša (2001: 97) points out that “a special problem in the case of legal translations are the standardised formulas. The legal translator should know them, because *recognisability* is one of the main demands in contract translation. In this case no formulation liberty can be allowed for the translator” (see also Stolze, 1992: 223–229).

As Latvia increasingly integrates in the Western social, cultural and administrative context, new problems arise with precise and relevant translation of denominations of some posts, positions and professional titles with no previous equivalents in the Latvian or even Soviet tradition. Here are only a few examples:

- Desk Officer (*vecākais referents* [at the Foreign Affairs Ministry]);
- Collateral Law Liaison (*Nodrošinājuma likumdošanas speciālists*);
- First Secretary for Press and Cultural Affairs (*preses un kultūras atašejis*);
- Key Account Manager (*Īpašo klientu sektora vadītājs*).

Similar difficulties arise when translating Latvian denominations of posts positions and professional titles into English. Not infrequently, blunders of the following type occur:

- *Latgales informācijas un kultūras biroja vadītājs* has been literally and erroneously translated as *Leader of Information and Cultural Bureau of Latgale*;
- *Valdes priekšsēdētājs* has become *Chairman of the Council* (although *valde* is *Board*);
- *Sekcijas vadītāja* becomes *Section Chief* (instead of *Head of the Department*).

Ideally in these situations translators and interpreters should use the version that has been approved in the concrete country, professional structure or institution. Practice shows that civil servants and holders of other posts and positions tend to overreact even if only an acceptable synonym has been used by the interpreter or translator.

Cases similar to the mentioned ones fit in Christiane Nord's translation convention theory (1991, 91–109) where she distinguishes between regulative and constitutive translation conventions. According to Nord, regulative conventions refer to generally accepted forms of handling certain translation problems.

In the Latvia of the last 20 years convention shift in translation is vividly manifested in the domain of forms of address: *misters, misis, miss, msjē, senjors* (for source language *Mr., Mrs., Miss, Monsieur, Signor*) have now been substituted by *kungs, kundze*. In the Soviet times the native forms *kungs, kundze* were used negatively as bourgeois, since they were widely in use in the independent Republic of Latvia. Since "comrade" could not function in any other context but Soviet, foreign forms of address were mostly transcribed and used as transmitters of national colouring (Zauberga, 1994, 68).

Still, it is questionable whether Latvian *kungs* without a surname attached for the English *sir* is the best example of translator's faithfulness. In English *sir* has partially lost its original meaning and now is mainly a politeness form, while *kungs* used alone (i.e., not together with a last name) in Latvian reflects social asymmetry more typical to the serfdom period in Latvia, and therefore sounds somewhat out of place in the context of the 21st century world. It is also evident that British honorary titles "Sir" and "Dame" cannot be translated into Latvian simply as "kungs" and "kundze"; at least, when rendering the honorary title "Sir" into Latvian the traditional transcribed version "sers + first name (+ surname)" could be retained, for "Dame" Latvian language has never had an appropriate equivalent.

Relations between Source/Target Language and Age Group in Translation

Here the problems are connected mainly with written translation and the performance of the translators of different generations.

Latvian translators of the older generation sometimes have translation problems connected with the adequate rendering of the names and abbreviations of new technologies, as, for example, computers, e-mail, the Internet, DVDs, mobile phones etc., becoming everyday life facts and therefore mentioned only casually in the source text. The casual reference to these technological innovations would be quite sufficient for a relatively younger generation, using all these devices every day, but would be totally insufficient for the older translators.

These translators admit they have problems with translating episodes of explicit sexual intimacy. For example, in 1973 Ernest Hemingway's novel "Across the River and into the Trees" was translated into Latvian. Ieva Zauberga (1994, 65–66) has observed that the translator has applied an idealized spoken Latvian version to taboo words and sexually explicit expressions, as the actual spoken Latvian would be too rough for the written language. – there are only 4 instances of direct transfer of taboos, and even then in two cases out of four the taboo word is replaced by three dots.

A similar case can be found in the translation of Kurt Vonnegut's stories "The Big Space Fuck" – here all taboos have been directly translated, but the translator has inserted an apologetic footnote saying that the word "fuck" cannot be literally translated as it has no Latvian counterpart and asking the reader to consult an American slang dictionary.

Latvia, as well as other countries of the Soviet bloc, was not involved in the "sexual revolution" encountered by the Western society in the 1960ies and the 1970ies, and until the end of the 1980ies/beginning of the 1990ies there were no cases in the Latvian translation practice (the same is true of the original Latvian fiction as well) of detailed depiction of sex episodes with description of genitals and psycho-physiological etc. processes. The problem here was to try to neutralize the generation-specific barriers of target language admissibility. Quite often translators of the older generation tried to use euphemisms, more harmless synonyms or simply avoid translating the "sauciest" episodes. Being very high level professionals in the art of translation they simultaneously felt uncomfortable that, being unable to cast aside the moral standards of their generation, they were forced to sacrifice their professional standards.

Nowadays the gap between the spoken and written colloquial Latvian is decreasing, as one can convincingly see in, for example, Jānis Elsbergs' translation of Scottish writer's Irvine Welsh's global bestseller and cult novel "Trainspotting" (direct translation of *cunt*, *fucker* etc.). Still, even in the first decade of the 21st century Latvian translators cannot help sounding milder than the authors they translate. Thus, translator Elsbergs admits that he has chosen softer words where the author of the novel has used only *hard-core* ones. The translator has tried to use the analogous slang of that used in the novel - slang lexicon, which is close to that used in the same social groups that are portrayed in the novel's original, yet not always as rude as it is in the original in order to, as he probably ironically states, – "not to spoil Latvian literary language" (Elsbergs, 2005:162).

Relations between Source/Target Language and Gender in Translation

There are differences in translating denominations of posts, professions and other similar categories, for example, from English into Latvian and from English into Russian:

English *director* (the forms *directress* or *directrix* for referring to a female director are very rare) have to be translated into Latvian as *direktors (M)* or *direktore (F)*, but into Russian – only as *директор*, because *директорша* would not correspond to the norms of the literary standard.

Ilze Zariņa (2007, 115–122) has examined German user manuals of electric shavers, epilators, hair cutters, hair dryers, electrical toothbrushes, as well as Latvian translations of these texts and has come to a conclusion that gender differences are observed in the electric shaver and epilator user manuals. The operating instructions meant for men are more matter-of-fact, possible medical consequences are not particularly singled out. On the contrary, the operating instructions meant for women contain advertisement of the product, and medical consequences are stressed.

I. Zariņa concludes that if the text of the user manual has not met the target readership requirements, the translation also will be unsuccessful.

Culture-specific Discrepancies of the Source and Target Speech Communities

Discrepancies of this kind can cause serious translation problems in certain types of texts, especially in advertisements. In her article “Subtext in Advertising on the Example of Armani ‘Black Code’ Campaign” Gunta Ločmele (2005, 98–104) writes that Armani ‘Black Code’ – the new fragrance for men – has a definite association complex in Western Europe and North America. Historically, The Mississippi Black Code (1865) dealt with the rights of the freed Afroamericans. More modern associations are manifested in the reference of the Black Code to computer security measures. In the internet campaign text of this fragrance the similarity between the fragrance bottle and the lapels of the famous Armani tuxedo is mentioned. The English advertisement text describes the new fragrance as elegant, timelessly sensual, understated yet heady.

The Latvian text runs as follows: “Armani. Black Code. Vīrišķīgi izsmalcināts, elegants vakara aromāts ar pikantām, austrumnieciskām notīm.” (Klubs, January 2005, 75). [Translation: Armani. Black Code. Masculinely refined, elegant evening fragrance with spicy, oriental nuances.]

According to Ulyanov (1988) the American students’ associations for “black” are *white* (751 respondent out of 1000), *dark* (54 out of 1000), *cat* (26 out of 1000). The Latvian audience’s associations for “black” are *death*, *mourning* (15%), *sorrow*, *night*, *darkness* (10%). Therefore, in order to eliminate the negative associations upon the target readership, the magazine advertisement for the fragrance (Klubs, December 2004, 2–3) shows a gentleman in a black tuxedo embracing a woman in underwear, both figures positioned against a black background.

The example mentioned above illustrates the shift that has occurred in the perception of translator’s loyalty. In order to define the phenomenon of translation Andre Lefevere uses the term *refraction* which seems to have gained acceptance (1992) – when light is refracted, it is thrown in different ways, it is not a straight reflection. Similarly a translation turns out to be a different text from its original.

Ieva Zauberga remarks that in a sense all translations qualify as hybrids as long as they can be viewed as a transplant of the source text in an alien, target culture environment; the degree of hybridisation of the target text depends very much on the status of translations in the target culture and ensuing translation conventions. (1997, 47–48).

Even though concepts of “faithful translation”, “equivalence” etc. are often perceived as terms symbolizing certain lack of flexibility in theoretical reasoning (Lefevere, 1992, 51), for smaller nations faithfulness as an approach still remains a dominant strategy. The author completely agrees with his colleague Ieva Zauberga that in cultures of minor nations – and Latvia is among these, “where translations have high cultural and even social standing or even prevail over national writing, target texts accommodate a larger amount of source-text elements and display a higher degree of heterogeneity as in better established cultures” (1997, 49).

In order to agree upon the principles of translator’s faithfulness in each concrete case, it is advisable for both the client (commissioner) of the translation and the translator to shape their contract along the lines of recommendations proposed by translation theorist Andrew Chesterman who proposes the following four groups of translation variables, along which both clients and

translators can make choices and agree upon: a) *equivalence variables* – function, content, form, style, degree of the source text's editing; b) *target language variables* – translation quality, presence or absence of localization or adaptation, correspondence to a concrete text-type, reflection of the value system of the client's company; c) *translator variables* – degree of translator's "presence" in the target text, involvement of one translator or a group, source language/target language as translator's native/foreign language, professional/amateur status of the translator, d) *special situational variables* – translation format, translation "environment"/means used in translation process, time spent for translation process.

Conclusions

1. The concept of equivalence as a measure of translator's faithfulness, in spite of its devaluation by numerous contradictory definitions along the lines of the tradition of structural linguistics and each pursuing a short-term goal, should be reassessed and, instead of suggesting an imagined symmetry of "equal values" in isolated linguistic systems, equivalence should be redefined in terms of economics of exchange, showing that exchange value in the source text-target text dichotomy is the decisive factor in both translation strategy and quality of the translated text.
2. Contrastive analysis of the illustrative material has shown that translation problems appearing in the three discussed pairs of sociolinguistic correlations prove that solutions should mostly be taken in favour of the target text readership expectations, simultaneously avoiding distortion of the source text material. The most frequent discrepancies between the source language/culture and target language/culture norms often are manifested in the difference of readership expectations in the usage of swear words and other substandard word-stock items in a written text conforming to the unwritten rules of the respective linguistic community.
3. In order to retain faithfulness at the stage of commissioning a concrete translation both the client and the translator are advised to discuss the essence and shape of the future target text in the light of Andrew Chesterman's proposition to make choices along the following groups of translation variables: translation equivalence, target text, translator and specificity of the situation.

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TULKOTĀJA LOJALITĀTE 21. GADSIMTĀ: SOCIOLINGVISTISKS SKATĪJUMS

Jānis Silis

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā aplūkots tulka/tulkotāja lojalitātes jēdziens un tā izpratnes izmaiņas 20. gs. beigās un 21. gs. Sākuma tulkojumzinātnē. Autors nonāk pie atziņas, ka minētajā laika periodā lojalitātes fokuss no avotteksta un tā autora lielā mērā pārvietojies uz mērķtekstu un tā lasītāju loku. Tulka/tulkotāja lojalitātes pakāpe nosaka tulkojuma vērtējumu tā „lietotāju” (resp., klausītāju un lasītāju) skatījumā Tulka/tulkotāja lojalitātes jēdziens translatoģijā cieši saistīts ar ekvivalences, adekvātuma un pieņemamības jēdzieniem.

Autors izvirzījis hipotēzi, ka vairāku sociolingvistisko faktoru kopums būtiski ietekmē tulka/tulkotāja lojalitāti, ko apstiprina vairāku sociolingvistisko korelāciju pāru ilustratīvā materiāla sastatāmā analīze.

Tulka, bet jo īpaši tulkotāja darba stratēģijas un taktikas izvēlē raksta autors iesaka izmantot translatoģa Endrū Čestermana (*Andrew Chesterman*) piedāvāto pieeju, kurā tulkotājs un tulkojuma pasūtītājs vienojas par tulkojuma saturu un formu, ņemot vērā četras mainīgo lielumu grupas – tulkojuma ekvivalenci, mērķvalodas parametrus, tulkotāja parametrus un situācijas specifiku nosakošus parametrus.