Global Character of Translation : An Introduction

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Abstract

The global character of modern economic activity demands that translation moves into centre stage from the wigs. Traditional non-literary translation lacks professionalism: The emphasis in such international bodies as the UNO is on interpretation; in the commercial world, most translators got into translating by accident rather than choice. There has been a revolution in the field of commercial translation in the last ten years. A professionally equipped manpower now works with machines that assure speed, consistency, machine-readability and customer-satisfaction.

Key words: global character , translation

Article

The ideal evaluator of translated works is one who is competent in both the source and the target language but translations are meant for him who does not know the source language. This paper examines this paradoxical situation. The other issue, also a paradoxical one, raised here is the compulsion of the Indians to translate Indian literature into English despite the accepted ideal situation that the target language should be translator's own language.

THE AMPHILINGUAL STATUS OF A TRANSLATION:

Literary critics and scholars rarely consider translations of foreign literature, particularly of poetry, seriously, though they are not reluctant to accept their general usefulness, and occasionally their importance in the creative activity of a particular writer or a group of writers. The main reason, or perhaps the only reason, of their scant regard for translation is the absence of sound criteria to judge them. *Medea* (Murray, 1910) in English translation, for example, remains a foreign work, though not necessarily incomprehensible or impenetrable, to its readers. It cannot be judged like other works written originally in English. Its merit has to be judged in the context of Greek literature or with reference to it. If the English version leaves us cold, we may or may not be sceptical about the claims of its greatness depending upon our knowledge of the original text or our faith in critics who had read it in Greek. Even if we find the English version satisfying we certainly cannot equate it with its original. Any translated text, even at its best, is but a reflection of its original. The English version of *Medea* does not belong to English literature, nor does it belong to Greek, though in some sense it belongs to both.

GLOBAL ECONOMY :

We have been talking for years about the 'global economy', but events of the last few years have shown clearly that this rather abstract concept is becoming a reality.

At the end of 1986 we had, in London, the so-called "big bang", the deregulation of the Stock Exchange, and ever since the world has in fact been one single stock exchange, which starts in the morning in Tokyo, moves through to Hong Kong and Singapore, then to Frankfurt and London, and then on to New York.

And the concept of the global economy is making itself felt in the world of commercial Translation. For modern industrialised countries, the problems of production and worldwide distribution, so long the centre of concern, have been solved. Within reason, we can produce anything, and ship it anywhere, whether it's bicycle pumps from Singapore to Sweden, or tower cranes from Germany to China. Every commercial company these days is operating on a global scale.

IMPORTANCE of TRANSLATION :

The problems today which are at centre stage are not production and distribution, but information and communication, both of which include translation as a major clement. If a company operates multi-nationally, it has to operate multilingually, too. Is translation, as a profession, ready for what is in fact a revolutionary situation? Translation has traditionally been a peripheral activity, carried out so to speak in the wings, of little interest to anyone except its practitioners. Now it has to move from the wings into centre stage, and into an unaccustomed limelight. Translators have got to be seen to perform effectively, economically and productively, and in some cases this is going to need a radical change of attitudes, I am personally convinced that we are only on the threshold of the great changes which are still to come, but before try to define what I think those changes will be, it is necessary to draw a picture of the present situation.

There is a paucity of information about the subject. There are hardly any surveys of the market for translation, or of the translation profession, and those that do exist are out of date, as change has been rapid these last three to four years.

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS :

The most visible areas in which translation is carried on are of course the international institutions. This paper is not about them but about private sector, or commercial translation, but I cannot avoid taking a look at the international institutions, since they are having a major influence on the professions.

For many years the biggest concentration of translators in the world was at the United Nations in New York, but because they work only in a limited number of major languages, and because interpreting is predominant over translation in their activities, they have not had a major influence on commercial translation. Their main achievement is the establishment and development of the whole profession of simultaneous interpreting, as it is now practiced in the world. The other major concentration of international organisation translation expertise is in the European Community. This it, so far as I am aware, the first major attempt in history to forge a single geo-political unit without one language being recognized as pre-eminent. It is a unique experiment. There are of course parallels with India, but in the sub-continent first English, and then Hindi, have been given *de facto* or *dejure* some sort of pre-eminence.

In the early history of the European Community, French did enjoy a *de facto* pre-eminence, but with the enlargement of the Community to include, Britain, Ireland and Denmark, there was a change of emphasis. English, the most widely used international language, was now an official Community language, and it could not avoid an eminentcal least as great as French.

This spurred the Community into even greater efforts at overcoming the language barrier, essentially by intensifying the translation effort, and this is where it had an effect on the profession as a whole. In 1977 the European Commonly organized a major international conference in Luxembourg actually called "Overcoming the Language Barrier", bringing together for the first u'me translators, researchers, machine translation specialists, and industrialists, both from the public and private sectors. This conference had a seminal effect on what had been a scattered and inward - looking profession. It was followed two years later by the first Translating and the Computer conference in London, organized by Alsip in conjunction with a translators' organisation, the Translators' Guild, a conference which the European Community helped to sponsor. This conference has become an annual event — ten in the series have now been held—and has continued the process of creating an outward-looking and more cohesive profession.

THE COMMERCIAL WORLD :

Moving from the international organisations to the commercial world, we find that industry in Western Europe and America gets translation done in one of four ways. A company can have its own translation department; it can use the services of its own employees or sales agent in the country of the target language; it can place work out, under contract or on an ad-hoc basis, to individual freelance translations; or it can use the services of a translation bureau.

In the English-speaking countries very few firms, even today, have a translation department with in-house translators. Partly this is because, cushioned by the world role of English, films have not woken up to the implications of trading in a multilingual world. But it is also partly due to the fact that outside English there is no clear-cut pre-eminent foreign language which conform the basis for organized translation activity. This is why the country where company in-house translation departments are most frequently found is the Federal Republic of Germany, which not only exports a lot of its production, but also exports primarily to the English-speaking world. So a typical German firm would set up a service for translating into and out of English, and their go on to expand this department to cope with French and Spanish, and then to other languages. Until very recently an astonishingly large proportion of translation work in the west, outside government services and international organizations, was carried out by people who are not professional translators. Typically firms would entrust the translation of sales brochures or even workshop manuals to their sales agents in the country of the target language, or, whenever a document in a foreign language was received, comb through their own workforce, to find anyone with a knowledge of the language in question, or whether they knew anyone, simply anyone, who did.

This is why a very high proportion indeed of the freelance translators aged over 50 practicing in die United Kingdom and the United States, and that means most of the senior members of the profession, got into translating by accident, rather than by a deliberate career choice. The proportion is somewhat less in non-English speaking countries, but is still high. Many translators are expatriates, often well-educated ladies who have settled in another country after marriage.

The pattern is changing with the younger translators, who have more and more taken a language degree at university followed by a post graduate diploma in translation.

Then, of course, commercial firms often put out work to translation bureaux. The typical bureau will have been started by a freelance translator, who put out work he is too busy to cope with, and work in languages he did not tackle himself, to colleagues, and the business, on some cases, mushroomed. This pattern seems to have been followed in all countries of Western Europe, and the United States. With very few exceptions, most bureaux have been fairly modest in size, and employed very few in-house translators, apart from the proprietor. Even the larger translation bureau relied for the most part on freelance translators, with just a handful on translators on the premises to cope with urgent jobs.

THE CURRENT SCENE :

But the last ten years have brought changes. Jobs are getting bigger, requiring team organization. Translation is no longer a completely separate activity, but is part of the information and documentation chain; translation bureaux have to provide more and more ancillary services, such a-foreign language typesetting, and communications. More and more translation activity is being done using aids of various kinds, and this requires capital investment.

Companies like INK in the Netherlands, which specializes in computer documentation, and Randall-Woollcott in the UK, which specializes in patent translations and a few technical fields, now rely almost entirely on in-house translators working in teams. Interestingly both these companies were started by persons who were not primarily linguists, INK by a computer documentation specialist, and Randall by a process engineer.

Another current trend is that the bigger translation bureau, or companies, are getting bigger, and they are having to work out a strategy for translation production. No longer is it a case of giving it to a translator, whether in-house or freelance, and telling him to get on with it. These days terminology has to be consistent, documents have to be in a machine-readable form compatible with the customer's requirements.

In the last 15 months there have been even more interesting developments. What happened is that the companies which have been selling machine translation systems to industry have made an interesting discovery. They have not been selling many systems, because many of the potential clients simply do not have the staff competent in languages who could operate them. But the huge marketing effort such well-financed companies have put in, and which translation activity has never had before, is revealing an enormous unsatisfied demand for translation. Two of these companies, Winder, now known as World Communications Corporation, or WCC, which is owned by the Japanese company Bravis, and ALPS of Utah, in the United States, drew the obvious conclusion, and decided to become themselves translation companies. WCC's efforts have been fairly modest, establishing translation bureau services at their United States and United Kingdom offices. But ALPS decided quite simply to go out and acquire some of the biggest bureau companies, and by purchase establish itself as the world leader in this field. These have included interlingua-TTI, UK-based, which was already thought to be the world's largest translation company, and Haehl, biggest company in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The French originally invented the term "les industries de la langue", and the term "language industry" has now entered general parlance in the language world. Translation is evidently big business now, and who knows where it will stop.

The next big developments are probably going to come, however, not from the West but from the so-called Pacific-rim countries. Japan is investing heavily in fifth generation computing power, including automatic translation and voice recognition systems. There have been reports that more than one Japanese Translation Company is considering expanding its activities to the west. Initiatives have been launched for cooperation in automatic translation projects between countries with major languages in this areas, Japanese, Chinese, Malay/Indonesian and Thai.

As part of a general approach to semantic resource extraction described in (Collin et al, 2010). We extracted a bilingual (English/French) dictionary from the translation table4 and the table of French articles5. Direct relations between French article titles and English article titles were stored in the form of a table that directly associates titles with their various translations: "*Avocat* (fruit)" _"*Avocado*" or "*Avocat (métier)*" _ "*Lawyer*", for example. This translation table is comparable to a bilingual dictionary having 540.920 links. Its specificity is that it contains animportant quantity of named entities and phrases, such as for instance: "*Avocat du diable*" _ *Devil's advocate*"; "*L'Avocat du diable (film)*" _"*Guilty as Sin*", that can be directly used for lexical translation. The technique we used to resolve ambiguities consists in refining the semantic and thematic scope of articles with the help of their associated categories. There are not always many of them 3 http://download.wikimedia.org/enwiki/latest/ downloaded Nov. 2009. 4 frwiki-latest-page.sql; frwiki-latest-langlinks.sql 5 frwiki-latest-langlinks.sql (especially in French), and they often are not informative enough to perform a satisfactory disambiguation. Moreover, linguistic processing for disambiguation is often based on hyperonymy or themes. For instance, one can use the knowledge that the fruit named (in French) "*avocat*" is part of the agriculture theme, whereas the court-based profession of *"avocat"* is of the law theme. Therefore, we have extended the representation of article's semantics with parent categories. In the Wikipedia category graph, every category has a parent category that generalizes it, following a thematic or hyperonymic direction. The highest category (parent of all other categories) is the category "article ". The necessary data to characterize the semantic scope of Wikipedia articles with the help of their associated categories was extracted from Wikimedia download sql files6. With these tables we listed all the paths between articles and the terminal category *"article"*. Since the quantity of such paths is too large (hundreds of paths for some articles), we made a relevant selection among all these paths, based on the assumption that the most relevant information is carried by the shortest path that links each of the article's categories to the terminal category. In fact, after some testing we realized that paths linking to the *"Article"* category were less

relevant than paths to the set of categories one level or two below the *"Article"* category, pointed to by the category page7. This set contains 150 pseudo terminal categories. For each article, we selected one path per associated category: the shortest path to one of the "pseudo terminal" categories. If several paths were of equal length, they were all selected. First of all, there is an analysis phase during which queries are segmented in lexical units that the Wikipedia-mined bilingual dictionary can translate. This phase associates one or several candidate translations to each lexical unit of the query, based on the multilingual Wikipedia links. We provide more details on this phase in section.

The second phase is the **disambiguation** : Since there often are several alternatives for each lexical unit, many combinations can be candidates to the final translation. In the case when queries are segmented into several lexical units, we choose the best combination, according to topic homogeneity with a specific method based on Wikipedia categories (Section 4.3).

SEGMENTATION OF THE QUERY :

Word for word translation of queries is often inaccurate because queries tend to include phrases, named entities or multi-word terms. For instance the title of the series "The persuaders" would never be literally translated to "amicalement vôtre", its French title that literally means "friendly yours". Many Wikipedia titles are made of several words and their equivalent titles in a different language are non literal translations of that lexical unit. In order to translate a query that has several words, it is therefore necessary to segment it into lexical units. In order to detail our segmentation algorithm, let us consider the example of a query composed of the 4 words A, B, C and D. Provided that only consecutive words can form a lexical unit, this query can be segmented in 8 different ways :

"ABCD"; "ABC,D"; "AB,CD"; "A,BCD";

"A,BC,D"; "AB,C,D"; "A,B,CD" or "A,B,C,D".

The choice of the best segmentation is based on the assumption that, if a succession of words can be translated as a whole, translating subunits of it would harm the accuracy of the translation. Our method consists in verifying, for each candidate segmentation, that its lexical units belong to the Wikipedia-mined bilingual dictionary (section 4.2) and therefore have one or several possible translations. This verification is made in decreasing order of units' sizes , until an acceptable segmentation is found. More precisely, the order of units' size s is defined by three rules: - The fewer lexical units in a segmentation, the better: the "A,B,CD" segmentation is preferred to the "A,B,C,D" one (R1). - For the same number of units, the segmentation with the longest unit is favored: "ABC,D" is preferred to "AB,CD" (R2). - For the same number of units and maximum size, the segmentation whose longest unit is the earliest is preferred: "ABC,D" is preferred to "A,BCD" (R3).

ACCEPTABILITY OF CANDIDATE SEGMENTATIONS:

The chosen segmentation is the first, in the order defined by the three rules R1 to R3, for which *"most of "* the units are translated. *"Most of"* is defined by a percentage of words of the source language query that belong to units that have translations. If the segmentation [AB][C][DE] is translated by [A'][][B'], where the single word unit [C] has no translation, the percentage of translated word is 80%. However, if a query is segmented as [ABC][DE] and is translated by [A'][], where [DE] has no translation, then its percentage is 60%. All the results presented here are based on an 80% threshold of acceptability.

Amphilingual status of a work in translation makes the task of critics extremely difficult.

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