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Linguistic and Extra-Linguistic Considerations in Translation

I

Translation is a branch of applied linguistics (cf. Ferguson & Morgan, 1959) and like other branches of applied linguistics — e. g. language teaching, language policy, literacy efforts, creation and revision of writing systems — it can be neither practised nor fully explained in terms of the linguistic science alone. However, the failure of linguistics to deal adequately with the phenomenon of translation, i. e. to evolve procedures, methods and techniques for the practice of translation on the one hand and a satisfactory theory of translation on the other, stems from two distinct sets of causes — which have not always been sufficiently distinguished in debates concerning the nature of translation.

One cause of the failure has been that linguistics is still not developed enough to make a contribution that practising translators might recognize as useful: as long as the ultimate in what the formal science of language can offer is an analysis of the "He swam across the river" type of sentence (cf. E. König, 1971), translators can hardly be expected to be impressed. This is by no means to say that theory is not necessary: it is indispensable but largely not yet available. The living practice of translation supplies great amounts of detail which remain largely unorganized and to that extent also of limited usefulness (cf. M. Wandruszka, 1969; cf. also the more tightly organized and more theoretically founded contributions by Vinay & Darbelnet, 1964, and A. Malblanc, 1966). Progress towards a theory of translation will only be made by painstaking work in both camps and by an effort of the two groups to appreciate and utilize each other's contributions.

The other cause of failure on the part of linguistics to account satisfactorily for what takes place in the process of translation lies in its inherent inability to deal with all aspects of translation. There are certain aspects of translation that are not linguistic in their nature but rather social and cultural, psychological, literary, etc. To what extent disciplines like sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, stylistics will be able to accommodate their findings into a coherent theory of translation remains to be seen. But there is no doubt at all that a multi--disciplinary approach will be needed and that a comprehensive theory of translation cannot be a linguistic theory of translation alone. (It is significant that authors of books on translation who analyze and describe actual translation practice, and not just isolated, usually concocted, examples to illustrate their views of translation equivalence, avoid the use of the term "linguistic" in their titles: thus, Vinay & Darbelnet, 1964, and A. Malblanc, 1966, speak of "stylistique comparée"; Nida, 1964, aims "toward a science of translating"; while Nida & Taber, 1969 offer the "theory and practice of translation".)

A satisfactory theory of translation would have to achieve two things: first, to trace and explain the (intuitive) processes in the mind of a translator while he is engaged in translation work, and second, to describe the results produced by these processes. It is obvious that — until neurophysiology becomes much better developed than it is today — we cannot hope to verify experimentally any statements regarding the mode of operation of the translator's mind. We can, however, observe the results of his translation work and from these results draw inferences about the nature of the processes involved.

Both the starting point and the end product of the process of translation is a piece of linguistic material — a text. The assumption is that the original (source) text and the translated (target) text stand in a relation of equivalence, that is that the meaning of the former has been "transferred" into the latter. If this is so, then it becomes possible to analyze translation as a process of replacing certain linguistic units of the source language by corresponding linguistic units of the target language. The whole (linguistic) theory of translation thus becomes a theory of how this replacement is effected. The difficulty with this kind of view is that it either presupposes a separation between form and meaning (one and the same meaning has to appear in two different forms) or is otherwise forced to admit that translation is not possible. The truth is, however, that translation, though difficult, is certainly possible — if for no other reason then for the fact that it has been practised for so long. At a more practical level, the trouble

with this view is that the equivalence of meaning is notoriously difficult to establish and almost impossible to control, primarily because different expressions of one and the same "meaning" seem to be motivated by reasons which are not (at this stage at least) linguistically analyzable.

The theoretical objections to this view are avoided in the view now widely adopted, according to which translation consists in the substitution of "messages in one language not for separate code-units but for entire messages in some other language" (R. Jakobson, 1959: 235) or in "reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the message of the source language" (E. A. Nida, 1969: 495). This is also intuitively more satisfactory to anyone who has ever engaged in actual translation work or in the analysis of other people's translations: it is clear to him that a translator "does not correlate the structures in two different codes. In practice a good 'translator' first understands the heard (or read) message in the input language, and then repeats the understood message now acting as a speaker of the output language" (N. D. Andrejev, 1964: 625).

When messages become the focus of translation effort, two important things happen: first, the question of equivalence appears in a new light, and second, emphasis shifts from formal--linguistic to other (in the first place social and cultural) factors. As for the first development, it is important to note that, for instance, words with their meanings are not translatable but that messages conveyed by them in different situations are. Thus, none of the English translations of the Croatian *seljak* (e. g. *peasant, farmer, villager, rustic, countryman,* etc.) is an equivalent of the Croatian word, but when a given message is being conveyed the translator will first of all interpret the cultural, or social, function of *seljak* in that particular situation and then select the English item(s) capable of performing the same function in the same situation. In doing this, he will necessarily neglect the components of meaning of the Croatian term which, though part of the total meaning of *seljak,* are not operative in the message that is being transmitted. In the following sentence, the word *seljak* functions in the same way in which *peasant* functions in the translated sentence, in spite of the fact that the Croatian "seljak" has never been indentical — in his way of life, mode of thinking and behaviour, or even manner of farming — to the English "peasant":

> Godine 1573. hrvatski su se seljaci pod vodstvom Matije Gupca pobunili protiv svojih feudalnih gospodara.
>
> In 1573, Croatian peasants, led by Matija Gubec, rebelled against their feudal masters.

Different components of *seljak* are part of the following message, whose English substitute would not readily accept *peasant* instead of *farmer:*

> Naša poljoprivreda moći će se razviti samo uz pomoć takvog poreznog sistema koji će stimulirati seljake da proizvode sve veće količine žitarica za potrebe tržišta.
>
> Our agriculture will only develop with a system of taxation which will stimulate farmers to produce increasing quantities of cereals for the market.

As for the shifting of emphasis from formal-linguistic to social and cultural factors, this is a direct consequence of the shift from words and structures to messages as objects of translation. This does not mean that linguistic units are now left out of consideration, since obviously it is only through them that the message is conveyed and since they also form part of the message. But the translator no longer pretends that he is translating words, morphemes, phrases, structures, sentences, etc.; as Haugen says, "... the input forces me to recreate in my mind the social context of the utterance and to search my memory for the closest equivalent in the output language. Instead of the single S—R box which receives the input and generates the output, I have to have two such boxes, one for each language. The channel between them is not a mechanism which matches words and structures, though it can also do this, but one which matches the message contents" (E. Haugen, 1964: 636). Haugen's "social context" is Catford's "situation" — a key term in establishing translation equivalence, which occurs when a source language and a target language text or item are relatable to (at least some of) the same distinctive features of situation substance (cf. J. C. Catford, 1965: 50). Thus the translation model may be represented as follows:

The translator has no access to the original situation (as conceived in the mind of the author) except through the source text ($text_1$), which he reads (or listens to) in order to reconstruct in his own mind the situation which has given rise to it. This effort at reconstruction will probably remain no more than partly successful since, first of all, the original situation is but imperfectly represented in the original author's text, and second, since the communication is never perfect and the reader or

listener, due to "noises in the channel", is only able to reconstruct some of the elements of the communicated situation, never all of them. The next part of the translator's task is to produce a new text (in the target language) which will express the original situation as he has understood it. And again, he will succeed only partly, because the language into which he is translating will allow him to express some of the elements of the situation in question more readily than others and will also, on its part, tend to introduce certain elements which the original author did not focus on in the situation to which he was reacting linguistically. Both obstacles can be illustrated with the Croatian noun *ujak* ("one's mother's brother") which is translated by *uncle* in English ("brother of one's father or mother"). The element "of one's mother" in this situation is not easily rendered in English (though it can be rendered if it becomes absolutely indispensable) and under-translation usually occurs in such cases. Conversely, the English noun *uncle* normally gets over--translated in Croatian, because — no matter whether he chooses *ujak* or *stric* (one's father's brother) as an equivalent — the translator is forced to bring into prominence those features of the situation which the original author did not (or could not easily) make prominent in his language.

It is important to mention at this point that the translator recontructs the original in his mind working through two consecutive channels: first, through the text — he breaks the original text down into its semantic components (cf. E. A. Nida, 1971: 341—348); second, through his own knowledge of the socio-cultural complex into which this situation fits. The new (translated) text is, ideally, made up of all those semantic components of the original text which the translator has managed to incorporate without sacrificing any of the functionally relevant features of the situation. ("A decision, in any particular case, as to what is functionally relevant in this sense must in our present state of knowledge remain to some extent a matter of opinion." — J. C. Catford, 1965: 94) But this is not all: the new text will also contain as much socio-cultural information as the translator finds necessary in order to give his reader a background that will begin to approach (though it will never match) the background that the original author has assumed in his native audience. This is the reason which lies behind the frequently voiced demands that translators should know not only the languages from and into which they are translating but also the cultures, social patterns, or subject matter of what they are translating — in short, that they should be not only bilingual but also bicultural. Actually, being bilingual means, for some authors, being bicultural; and trans-

lating means translating cultures, not languages: "In effect, one does not translate LANGUAGES, one translates CULTURES. Ethnography may, in fact, be thought of as a form of translation. That it is possible to translate one language into another at all attests to the universalities in culture, to common vicissitudes of human life, and to the like capabilities of men throughout the earth, as well as to the inherent nature of language and the character of the communication process itself; and a cynic might add, to the arrogance of the translator." (J. B. Casagrande, 1954: 338)

In this extreme formulation, the view just quoted — though patently true — is not very useful in developing a theory of translation. It does not pay to forget that language is not only the carrier of culture but also part of every culture. And that the translator, in translating culture, also translates features of expression. While the ease or difficulty of translating components of culture depends on the measure of common cultural heritage between the speakers of any two languages, the ease or difficulty (or even the very possibility) of translating features of expression depends on the genetic relationships between the languages concerned.

II

The implication in what has just been said, and throughout this papper, is that both linguistic and extra-linguistic considerations apply in translation work and that they should also both form part of any theory of translation. The second part of this paper will examine some types of extra-linguistic considerations in translation involving English and Croatian, and particularly those which operate parallelly, or become inextricably mixed, with linguistic considerations.

The most obvious type of example in whose translation (or failure to translate) extra-linguistic considerations predominate is the one that concerns expressions which form part of one (source) culture but not of the other (target) culture. Examples abound and present well-known difficulties that every translator has experienced. Their translation is difficult not because the distinctive features of the situation are incapable of being expressed in the other language but because their linguistic expression necessitates an analytic listing of the semantic components, and this then affects the form of expression which is itself — and not just in poetry — one of the relevant features: it is possible to translate *apsolvent* as "a senior undergraduate who has completed his course of study but has not taken his final

examinations", but it is plainly not possible to use this definition instead of the unit term in all its occurrences, particularly not in those where it appears as part of fixed collocations, such as *vječiti apsolvent* "a student who spends all his life preparing for the final examinations after having completed the prescribed course of study, or one who never bothers to take the finals but rather remains indefinitely in the status of a person with all the courses behind him but without a degree"), *apsolventski staž* ("the period that has elapsed from the moment that a particular student completed his course of study"), *apsolventska prava* ("certain social and university rights and benefits enjoyed by people who have completed their course of study but have not taken their finals"), *apsolventski rok* ("special examination period for such people"), *apsolventski ples* ("a dance organized by such people to celebrate the completion of their course of study"), etc. The solution that translator ultimately adopts will be both culturally and linguistically motivated: first, if the need for describing the situation expressed by *apsolvent* in Croatian remains very limited in English (if, for instance, the term appears only once in a text), "translation-by-definition" or an explanation in the footnote will have to suffice; second, if the need becomes more widespread or frequent (within the language as a whole or within a single text) the solution migth be sought in lexical importation — this is how foreign words enter a language together with the entry of foreign situations into the culture; third, in some cases when an element of foreign culture is introduced, certain of its features are used (different from those exploited in the original culture) to form a term in the target language — thus we get *kemijska olovka* as a translation of *ball-point pen;* fourth, the linguistic expression of an unknown element of culture may be a composite, in the source language, of items that can be translated literally, or with minor modifications, into the target language — thus, although multi--channel television is not yet part of Croatian culture, there is no difficulty in the translation of this term, since *višekanalna televizija* is easily formed and readily understood, just as *radničko samoupravljanje* is readily translated in English by *workers' self-management.* Cultural gaps involve not only individual items but also whole patterns of behaviour, different customs, etc. They are translated by explanatory texts or, since nothing corresponds to them in the target culture, are left out altogether: it is customary in the Croatian culture to wish a good appetite to people who are preparing to start a meal or are already eating, and the appropriate expression is *Dobar tek.* The English culture has no custom of this kind, nor does the language have a suitable expression, and the translation is

usually zero, or an explanatory note is used to describe the custom: *They wished one another an enjoyable meal.* Similarly, the custom of *koledanje* has no exact counterpart in the English culture and is translated descriptively as "pre-Christmas congratulation visits with carol singing and collection of gifts".

The second type of example of the role played by extra--linguistic considerations in translation appears in those cases in which both cultures contain a certain element or pattern of behaviour but express it differently, focusing on different aspects of the same situation. This is the most intriguing type of translation process and one in which societal concerns play a major role. It cannot be analyzed by formal linguistic criteria alone but only in conjunction with sociolingustic criteria, criteria of usage, and even those of the differing "views of the world" reflected in individual languages. When the sentence

> Nedavno sam navršio četrdesetu godinu. ("Not long ago I completed the fortieth year /of my life/")

is translated as

> Not long ago I celebrated my fortieth birthday.

a shift has occurred which it is useless to attempt to analyze in purely linguistic terms. Unfortunately, it would be presumptuous to say that we know exactly what has happened and that we can analyze the process formally. The only thing that can be said is that Croatian usage requires that the statement of one's age be expressed in terms of completing so many years of one's life, while English usage requires that is should be made in terms of the number of birthdays celebrated by that person. The completion of so many years of one's life can be expressed, but this is then no longer a neutral, straightforward statement of one's age in English and can no longer be said to refer to the situation in which the Croatian sentence was uttered. Conversely, the Croatian speaker can speak of having celebrated his n-th birthday, but that will bring into prominence the birthday itself and the celebration rather than the years lived by that person. All this is very interesting but hardly illuminating. Each such case remains an isolated occurrence and there is no gurantee that the same result will be obtained the next time when somebody else attempts the translation of the same example. And yet, it is important to gather individual examples, to look at them, to follow the (largely subconscious) workings of the translator's mind, and to hope that a pattern will emerge, that it will then serve as a basis for a hypothesis which will be developed, tested, refuted, replaced — and so on. Nothing like this exists as yet, and this paper can do no more than make a plea for more work in this direction. And suggest that this

is the central problem of translation and that it will not be solved by formal linguistic procedures alone. The question of why *home* should become *krov nad glavom* ("a roof over one's head") in:

> The floods left over 20,000 people homeless.
> Preko 20.000 ljudi ostalo je u toj poplavi bez krova nad glavom.

is not just a linguistic question. (The question of why English speakers refer to homes in this situation and Croatian speakers to roofs over the victims' heads is a legitimate question even though we have no satisfactory answer to it.)
Similarly:

> Niste vi slučaj za psihijatra. ("You're not a case for a psychiatrist").
> You're not a mental case.
>
> Neće reći kako se zove. ("He won't say what he is called.")
> He won't give his name.

The translator's reasoning in the first of these two pairs of sentences might have been something like this: a case for a psychiatrist = a case of the kind that a psychiatrist usually gets = a psychiatric case = a case of mental disorder = a mental case. All those versions are grammatical in English but only the last is normally used in the kind of situation represented in the original sentence. It sounds as professional as the original and also as direct and colloquial. In the second pair, the translator notices the oddity of the literal version and the stylistic incongruity of its active-voice alternative ("He won't say what they (people) call him"); he then notes that "what's your name?" is the socially accepted form of this question in addressing humans, just as "What is it called?" is the appropriate question in reference to things. Finally, he may also be aware of the pattern:

> Neće reći gdje stanuje. ("He won't say where he lives.")
> He won't give his address.
>
> Neće reći što radi / čime se bavi. ("He won't say what he does / what he occupies himself with.")
> He won't give his occupation.
>
> Neće reći koliko je star. ("He won't say how old he is.")
> He won't give his age.

The fact that some of the literal translations are as acceptable as the "free" versions shows that it is possible to have more than one linguistic expression of one and the same situation (this follows also from the fact that translation is at all possible); but the problem for the translator at this point is to decide whether they both express exactly the same situation and how far the expressions can be allowed to differ before the situations

begin to differ significantly too. The translator's difficulty here is no easier than when no expression can be found in the target language to express the original situation.

Finally, there is one more type of example that points to the importance of extra-linguistic considerations in translation: it is the one which consists in various additions to, deletions from or restructurings in, the original text which the translator regards as necessary in order to reproduce the situation that served as a starting point for the original author. The author of the original was, obviously, writing for a certain audience and he assumed a certain kind of experience or background knowledge in the audience, which in turn determined his choices in using language (cf. B. Bernstein, 1971:234). But the translator knows his own audience, and he knows that their experience is different — so his choices will have to be different too.

Since the original text does not contain the information that the author knew was known to his audience, the translator will have to expand the original statement to bring in the information that his audience does not share with the original author. This expansion is needed more and more, the further one moves from one's own culture and one's own period of time. The original author writes for an in-group, which requires implicit meanings, while the translator tries to bring the author to an out-group, which requires explicit meanings. This is particularly easy to illustrate with names and titles:

> He is a student of history at Ohio State.
>
> On studira povijest na državnom sveučilištu američke savezne države Ohio.
>
> Spomenik autoru "Lijepe naše" nalazi se u jednoj veoma slikovitoj kotlini Hrvatskog Zagorja. ("The monument in honour of the author of Our Beautiful stands in a picturesque valley in Hrvatsko Zagorje.")
>
> The monument in honour of the author of the Croatian national anthem, "Our Beautiful Fatherland", stands in a picturesque valley in the region of Hrvatsko Zagorje in northwest Croatia.

"Interpretive translating" is also called for when certain expressions become shorthand versions of something that cannot be easily inferred from their direct translation:

> Sva naša nastojanja usmjerena su na jačanje pozicija udruženog rada. ("All our efforts are directed towards giving greater power to associated labour.")
>
> All our efforts are directed towards giving greater power to direct producers associated in worker-managed enterprises / in enterprises run on the principles of workers' management.
>
> Nadamo se da će nam ove nove investicije omogućiti bolji položaj na domaćem tržištu i olakšati sudjelovanje u međunarodnoj podjeli rada. ("We hope that these new investments will enable us to gain

a better position in the domestic market and to participate more easily in the international division of labour.")

We hope that these new investments will enable us to gain a better position in the domestic market and to sell our products more easily on the foreign markets.

The translator often "interprets" the original, even when what he adds is not the kind of information that would not otherwise be accessible to his audience. In this case, he merely smoothes the logical thread of the original and makes it easier to read:

Kroz hodnik doprije deset noćnih sati, a istodobno se s gumare muklo javi sirena noćne smjene. ("The sound of a clock striking ten rang through the corridor, and at the same time the rubber works' siren hoarsely announced the night shift.")

The sound of a clock striking ten rang through the corridor, and at the same time the rubber works' siren hoarsely announced the start of the night shift.

Onda je svjetlo preletjelo kao plameno krilo iznad jarbola i udarilo stotinjak metara ispred pramca. ("Then the light flew like a wing of flame over the mast and struck some hundred metres away from the bow.")

Then the light flew like a wing of flame over the mast and struck the water some hundred metres from the bow.

This type of procedure in translating is both necessary and very sensitive. The translator must assess his audience very carefully and then make the required adjustment: but his intervention must be neither too much nor too little — only so much that his audience, reading the translation, may feel as much at home in it as the original author intended his audience to feel in the original text. In order to be able to do this, the translator must obviously know more than just the two languages. And he must bring his extra-linguistic knowledge to bear on his translating.

To sum up, then: of the three types of tasks that demand the application of extra-linguistic considerations in translation, clearly the most important and most difficult is the second type. It is most difficult for the practical translator and even more so for the would-be translation theorist. Linguistic and extra-linguistic considerations are at work together here and we must first learn to recognize this and then to study them both in their joint action.

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