

Role of Translators and Interpreters in Global Business

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Abstract: *This paper explores the effect of globalization on the translation industry and the demands it places on translators. The paper argues that translators are not only individuals with some knowledge of the source or target language, but they also often act as mediators between the discourse of the source culture and the discourse of the target audience. To be a successful translator, one has to possess the knowledge of both the general culture of the target audience, specialized knowledge within the domain of that particular text, and perfect knowledge of the target language, not to mention the ability to detect any particularities in the source text and language. The article argues for the imperative of equipping modern interpreters and translators with a set of extra-linguistic assets imposed by the modern economic structure of the world. The paper traces back the history of the English language as an example of the domineering linguistic power that has been solidified by socio-political and economic status leading up to considering it a globalized code. The outcome of this universal metamorphosis has reached such a point that it requires from people worldwide and namely in specific areas of trade to adapt to these exigencies. In this sense, global and business exchanges cannot be successfully realized without a strong probability of understanding the message issuing from the other. Hence the need to create interlinguistic agents that are able to minimize the existing nuances between people of the world primarily for universal economic reasons. Those people are supposed to reach beyond the linguistic requirements for the act of translation and to embrace the demands of the specific business field or area which in is in itself a part of competency within the boundaries of modern training impositions. The article contends as well for the need on the part of modern translators to embrace modern technological innovations that are supposed to be shielded to support the human trials to bring in concrete shape poles-apart nations. In a globalized world, technology invades all life domains where translation studies are no exception. The paper concludes by suggesting strategies for translators to position themselves as assets to their organization and to counteract the belief that anyone with language experience can translate.*

Keywords: *Globalization, technology, translation, interpreting, mediation, discourse, brands.*

Résumé : *Cet article explore l'effet de la mondialisation sur l'industrie de la traduction et les exigences qu'elle impose aux traducteurs. L'article soutient que les traducteurs ne sont pas seulement des individus ayant une certaine connaissance de la langue source ou cible, mais qu'ils agissent aussi souvent comme médiateurs entre le discours de la culture source et le discours du public cible. Pour être un bon traducteur,*

il faut posséder à la fois la connaissance de la culture générale du public cible, des connaissances spécialisées dans le domaine de ce texte particulier et une parfaite connaissance de la langue cible, sans oublier la capacité de détecter d'éventuelles particularités dans le texte source et la langue. L'article défend l'impératif de doter les interprètes et traducteurs modernes d'un ensemble d'atouts extra-linguistiques imposés par la structure économique moderne du monde. L'article retrace l'histoire de la langue anglaise comme un exemple du pouvoir linguistique dominant qui a été solidifié par le statut socio-politique et économique menant à la considérer comme un code mondialisé. L'aboutissement de cette métamorphose universelle a atteint un tel point qu'il demande aux hommes du monde entier et notamment dans des domaines spécifiques du commerce de s'adapter à ces exigences. En ce sens, les échanges mondiaux et d'affaires ne peuvent se réaliser avec succès sans une forte probabilité de comprendre le message issu de l'autre. D'où la nécessité de créer des agents interlinguistiques capables de minimiser les nuances existantes entre les peuples du monde principalement pour des raisons économiques universelles. Ces personnes sont censées aller au-delà des exigences linguistiques de l'acte de traduction et embrasser les exigences du domaine ou du domaine d'activité spécifique qui en soi fait partie de la compétence dans les limites des impositions de formation modernes. L'article soutient également la nécessité pour les traducteurs modernes d'adopter les innovations technologiques modernes qui sont censées être protégées pour soutenir les essais humains visant à concrétiser des nations aux pôles séparés. Dans un monde globalisé, la technologie envahit tous les domaines de la vie où les études de traduction ne font pas exception. L'article conclut en suggérant des stratégies permettant aux traducteurs de se positionner comme des atouts pour leur organisation et de contrecarrer la croyance selon laquelle toute personne ayant une expérience linguistique peut traduire.

Mots clés : *globalisation, technologie, traduction, interprétariat, médiation, discours, marques.*

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, information and communication technologies have been influential, and their influence has impacted the way translators and interpreters do their job. Many communication and technical tools have entered the translation industry, making it difficult for a non-professional translator and interpreter to compete. In light of these changes, translators and interpreters training must take a hard look at what is happening these days and address the emerging translation and interpreting technologies, i.e. localization, financing and economics translation and interpreting, conference and medical interpreting, remote interpreting, computer-assisted translation and interpreting and automatic speech translation. Due to globalization and the advancement of technology, the demand for translation and interpreting in these areas has increased, with a larger variety of texts being translated or interpreted into more language pairs. The rapid development of information technology has changed the way translators and interpreters access information as well as the way they do their job. The speed of transactions has been reduced to a click of the mouse and translators and interpreters are feeling the same time constriction.

It is worth mentioning that the ratio of native to non-native English speakers is decreasing and non-native speakers are frequently asked to write in their second or third language. Scholars from different parts of the world are being marginalized due to the dominance of English in academic publications and companies have had to tailor their communication policy to the globalized workforce.

Furthermore, the exponential acceleration of globalization over the past four decades has led many disciplines into uncharted territory, with possibilities for global dialogue and collaboration hitherto unseen. The rise of mass communication technology, beginning with print and radio, followed by television and most recently the Internet, have all created an increased demand for translation (Bielsa, 2005). According to the World

Economic Forum (2022), broadband expansion was not only an American phenomenon, but also it is a global phenomenon that is happening all over the world. While less than 7% of the world was online in 2000, today over half of the global population has access to the internet. There are also similar trends that are affecting the whole world. Let us take cellphones as an example. In 2000s, there were 740 cell phone subscriptions worldwide. In 2020, the number of subscriptions has surpassed 8 billion. This means there are now more cellphones in the world than people. At the same time, technology has invaded every home and it has become more personal and portable. For example, in 2001, Apple sold its first iPod and over a decade later it released the iPhone. This has led to the creation of personal technology, which has impacted every living being and touched nearly everything we do. From a business perspective, the application of scientific knowledge to the practical aims of human life has impacted us tremendously. Looking in the rear-view-mirror, over the past 20 years, technology has changed major sectors and humans have some exciting technology developments, be it at the healthcare level, media mobile and car industry, etc.

Furthermore, the increased flow of information from sources around the world, particularly through the Internet, has not only increased the over-all demand for translation but also the variety of translations required, as people from every language can contribute to the world wide web and reach out to a global audience to write about any topic they choose. As long as a person is in receiving distance of a radio or satellite signal, they have virtually unlimited and instantaneous access to the vast network of people and organizations using the Internet.

Communities with minority languages or marginalized cultures, supposing that they are not limited by their refusal to use new technology (unlike the Amish communities, for example), now have a relatively low-cost forum through which they can perpetuate and transmit their language, beliefs, and culture. According to Cook (2011), projects such as Gutenberg (2010) have made it easier to access information or cultural texts in a greater number of languages – Project Gutenberg has provided access to public domain texts in 59 different languages as of 2012. There is thus greater demand for unusual language pairs and for translation into more languages, for, as Bielsa (2005, p. 11) notes, “people’s own language continues to be the preferred language for access into informational goods”. However, despite the large number of languages out there on the web, it is true that the large amount of information is in English, and although the ratio of native English speakers to non-native speakers declines each year, there are more English speakers in the world than ever before. What does that mean for an English translator in the corporate world?

2. Globalization and Translation

As Cronin (2013) argues, global communication and business interactions cannot take place without interlingual activities and therefore globalization involves translation. Nevertheless, there are always language barriers that we as human beings cannot overcome, and the only way to overcome them is through translators or interpreters’ cross cultural and interlingual communication. This has been so in the past and continues to be until the present.

Globalization, as many have pointed out, is not a recent development. If one considers globalization to be the flow of goods and people between cultures, then globalization is a process that is as old as human civilization and will continue long after the Internet and other cutting-edge technologies have become obsolete (Morris, 2000). What has changed is the density, the volume of the flow of information and goods between units, and the time needed to effectuate these exchanges. At the beginning of the last century, it could take weeks or even months for goods to be traded between continents. Now, with the click of a mouse, money can be transferred around the globe within milliseconds, and goods can be transferred from Australia to Alaska within 24 hours using jet planes. The effect has been different on the translation industry, which fights to keep up with the increased volume of work and the growing demand for instantaneous translation. As Bielsa (2005, p. 8) noted in one of her articles, translation and globalization share an essential characteristic if regarded in terms of increasing or enabling contact between cultures because, “translation is all about making connections, linking one culture and language to another, setting up the conditions for an open-ended exchange of goods, technologies and ideas”. The expansion of trade relations through multinational companies and Internet businesses has increased the number of contracts being concluded between companies around the world.

Internet businesses rely on ease-of-access and convenience as factors to outsell their brick-and-mortar counterparts, and both conventional and Internet companies are looking for speed in their transactions, as per the old adage “time is money”. Fortunately, the rise of the Internet has shifted the onus of gathering information that translators face from practical difficulties in getting access to information towards selecting “trustworthy information from the range of options available” (Pym, 2004, p. 14). Bielsa (2005, p. 9) explains how this need for speed is rendering the translator invisible, because “the conception of instantaneous transmission of information flows implies translation’s invisibility...and as a consequence of time-space compression, [which] generates, according to Cronin, the pressure to approximate more and more to the ideal of instantaneous transparency. The need for instantaneous communication in real time generates the need for simultaneous real-time translation in which the human factor is finally eliminated”. An example of this growing trend is the development and growing popularity of machine translation programs such as Google Translate and translation memory databases. Although great strides have been made in the field of machine translation, the complexity of language and the importance of context in the translation process have conspired to perpetuate the necessity of human involvement on anything except the simplest repetitive texts. Even there, as Pym (2004, 11) notes, “texts are composed of many messages on many levels, delimited and activated in accordance with particular conditions involved. These messages are of unequal importance for the attainment of success conditions”. Pym goes on to give the example of how in a translation of a birth certificate, a mistake in the name of the birth mother would have greater consequences than a mistake in the name of the midwife (Pym, 2004, p. 11); and a machine error in translating “date” as the calendar day rather than as the fruits being exchanged in a contract, for example, could have grave consequences for inattentive traders.

3. Mediation

One problem that has constantly plagued translators and which is becoming more of a problem with the rapid expansion of intercultural exchange is that the general public does not consider translation to be a specialized task requiring more than mere competence in the two languages. It is often expected that any individual with some knowledge of the source or target language can adequately translate a text, and frequently non-native speakers are writing and translating into their second, third, or fourth language, without any reference to the idea that “cross-cultural communication involves the perceived crossing of a point of contact between cultures” (Pym, 2004, p. 2), not just changing languages. This can have grave consequences in legal and political contexts, because translators do much more than take a text in one language and render it into another – they often act as mediators between the discourse of the source culture and the discourse of the target audience. Discourse, as defined by Gee (1989, p. 7) is a “form of life which integrates words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes”.

Translators are thus asked to look at the over-all position of the source text in its native culture and to reproduce a text in the target language that will strike the same tone and register in the target reader in a certain context, which falls under Pym’s (2004, p. 7) loosely defined “mediated cross-cultural communication”. To do so successfully requires a great deal of knowledge of both the general culture of the target audience, specialized knowledge within the domain of that particular text, and perfect knowledge of the target language, not to mention the ability to detect any particularities in the source text and language. I do not wish to go into the question of cultural dominance or subversion, nor address the question of globalization creating a cultural hegemony, for translation studies, just as Mazzarella (2004, p. 360) states about globalization studies, “announces neither the end of culture nor the end of difference. Rather, they remind us that culture is an effect of social processes of mediation, that these processes of mediation always grapple with internal indeterminacies as well as external provocations, and that social actors – consciously or unconsciously-try to manage or fix these indeterminacies and provocations by reified schemes of cultural identity and cultural difference. That such a “fixing” is at once both necessary and impossible and is one of the ground rules of cultural politics”. This strikes at the heart of the translation quandary of foreignization versus domestication and the impossibility of translation, but much more learned scholars than I have already written a great deal on this subject. There is great discussion and dissension among translation studies scholars as to whether translators should foreignize or domesticate the target text, but that argument is also one that I will not go into here - although it would be an interesting study to see which approach works best in a business rather than a literary context. It is worth noting that globalization theorists hold culture and economics to be “profoundly interdependent”, much as do translation study theorists, and recognize that “cultures are exchanged along with commodities” (Jay, 2001, p. 36).

The adoption of English as the language of trade and business, and of education to a lesser degree, stemming back to the rise of the British Empire and strengthened over time through the dominance of America in the post-World War Two era, has created another problem for translators, particularly English language translators. The ratio of native speakers of English to non-native speakers is steadily diminishing, and most

business, engineering, and technical schools require students to pass English tests such as the TOEFL or IELTS before they can receive their diploma. Even in prestigious well-known academies, students must take English lessons and pass their TOEFL to receive their diplomas. Unfortunately, although the students and professors often have an excellent understanding of the English language, they do not have quite the level needed to adequately grasp the differences in tone and register, or to avoid the many pitfalls created by the myriad of exceptions in the English language. Their belief that they possess the required knowledge to write their academic papers in the language is not entirely unfounded, but, as many scholars are discovering, there is more than language which matters in drafting a text. The flow of logic and the method of argumentation differ vastly between cultures, and the style of language can also do so. One may think of the French elegant variation, and the very poetic Arabic flowing style to the concise and often blunt style of business English. Academic English, it could be argued, is its own language and discourse which many native English speakers do not manage to master. This has resulted in a dearth of published foreign scholars and the marginalization of foreign universities in the “Publish or Perish” war that academics are engaged in around the world.

Many multinational companies have adopted English as a corporate language and train employees to work in English to facilitate communication between different points of contact within the company and between the managerial echelons and the manufacturing or service centers. Although the level of English is often more than adequate for face to face communication where the facial expression and voice intonations help fill any language gaps, the level of written English is not quite sensitive enough to navigate the shoals of business communication between cultures. Once again there is also the question of internal logic within the structure of communication as well. Many English speakers prefer e-mails to be short and to the point, with the main purpose appearing in the first lines of text, but other cultures (Arabic for example) often prefer to justify their request before stating what they are actually requesting. This creates impatience and often tension between business partners, with the counterparts feeling frustrated because one appears rude, and the other seems never to get to the point (Bloch & Starks, 1999). Some companies have tried to mitigate this culture clash within their organisation by adopting a global corporate identity and educating their employees on the corporate writing and communication style which should be used worldwide, often as part of their brand strategy. This helps cut down on the internal tension between different offices within the company and helps strategically position the company in the global marketplace. The problem is that even with these corporate guidelines, it is not enough to bridge the gap in the writing skills and cultural perceptions of the non-native speaker employees and some multinational companies are still left with a competitive disadvantage compared to companies whose correspondence is carried out only by native speakers of the language. This is particularly true in the service industry where the interaction between client and employees is what drives company growth and reputation is everything.

4. Suggested Strategies for Translators and Interpreters

Translators, both freelance and in-house, can use several strategies to increase their value to clients. One is to use their superior knowledge of both source and target culture to help cross-cultural marketing of a product, and indeed, “an area of significant growth in the

translation industry over the last two decades has been the activity of localisation, through which a product is tailored to meet the needs of a specific local market” (Bielsa, 2005, p. 11). Translators and interpreters need to position themselves as more than mere dictionaries to provide a word or phrase when needed, but rather as “interlinguistic mediators”, which Valero-Garcés (2005, p. 3) defines as “a person who facilitates communication, understanding and action between people whose language and/or culture is different. His/her role consists of interpreting the expressions, intentions and perceptions of one group for the other in order to establish a balanced communication between them”. In order to do so, the translator needs to demonstrate to their client that they possess, “apart from a deep knowledge of the languages, a high grade of cultural sensibility which allows him/her to negotiate the meaning between both cultures and be able to translate it to the other community”. By deploying “specific expertise allowing them to provide advice on cross-cultural communication” (Pym, 2004, p.16), translators create added value for their company and solidify their role in the customer service channel. Furthermore, the ability to “present explicit justifications of the decisions made...and the ability to use such justifications enables [the translator] to...act as consultants and managers within this field”. (Pym, 2004, p.19). This ties in with one of the approaches to translation in international business contexts that Steyaert and Janssen (1997) set out in a managerial approach to translation wherein translators are involved in the creation process of the new texts, not simply handed the pre-formulated text to translate.

Financial or economic translators, particularly in-house translators, also need to consider their role as going beyond the act of translation and should educate themselves about all aspects of the company’s business, according to Pym (2004, p. 12), “senders, receivers and clients tend to be intuitively aware of the risk distributions, since they have the most direct interests in the attainment of success conditions. Mediators, however, tend to be less aware, since they work more directly on the texts”. A good translator should have enough knowledge of the company’s interests to concentrate their efforts on the areas where the risk of miscommunication is greatest and where the consequences of such miscommunication would be greatest.

One-way businesses have adapted to the pressures of globalization and need to create corporate cultures for their companies, often tied into their brand. This corporate culture “refers to a system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and day-to-day rituals that distinguish one group from another” (Steyaert and Janssens, 1997, p. 5). Multinational companies are challenged to provide the same experience for their customers and to maintain the same quality standards and service standards for each marketplace they serve. It has also become harder for companies to stand out from the crowd in the global market since clients are no longer limited to choosing local businesses, which means that companies must work harder to attract and retain their clients. Branding is another way companies differentiate themselves from competition with the same product offerings, and the field of branding has exploded dramatically along with the rise of globalization. The information flow that has allowed companies to extend their reach globally also works for the client – complaints from abroad can impact the domestic market and vice-versa. Reputation is paramount and tight control must be exerted over the brand to ensure that it is not damaged by shoddy work in another part of the world.

In service companies, this means that every piece of communication going out to clients and partners must fit the brand image to better showcase the positive brand culture. Verbal identity is one way by which companies have chosen to project a cohesive image to its clients, and competitors are also where a translator can add a great deal of value to the company. A company's verbal identity can be considered as the organization's collective voice with which it defines the business culture of the global organization. (Frieivalds, 2005, p. 24) A translator working within a brand framework must already adapt the style and the form to best match with the goals of the text and the brand image. In many respects, the in-house translator is spending more time enforcing the brand, or, as David Bernstein (2003, p. 1136) put it, "acting as brand guardian, ensuring coherence, guaranteeing that everything done in the brand's name reinforces the brand's values and personality". If, as it should be, translators are the last people to touch the text before it is distributed to the clients, they are also the final arbiters as to whether a piece complies with brand standards and principles, and as such is acting as a brand manager, driving brand equity and creating added value for the company.

5. Conclusion

The exponential rate of globalization, seen as the process of change effected by interaction, is placing increasing demands on translators and interpreters around the world. Global businesses are prospering, and globalization today is more impactful than it has ever been, simply because big international organizations such as Apple and Facebook, among others, are taking huge steps towards technology improvement and innovation, something that has created more demand for translators and interpreters.

Also, due to globalization, translating key documents in business or economic, or interpreting in both written and oral forms of communication is becoming vital and translators and interpreters have become important assets to any business organization. Their knowledge and expertise in cross cultural communication play a vital role in global business. Also, translation and interpreting technologies are here to stay, and translators and interpreters' deep understanding of these technologies is fundamental, not only to keep them in demand, but also to protect the profession. Knowledge of translating and interpreting technologies has become significant and translators and interpreters need to develop awareness of how to best integrate translation and interpreting technologies in their workflow.

Furthermore, the time pressure and the sheer volume of translation created by the international networks of companies, nations, and organizations, as well as the increasing number of multilingual individuals in the workforce, have made it more important than ever for professional translators/interpreters to position themselves as cross-cultural mediators and as important players in creating value for their employers. They can do this by functioning as brand managers, localizers, medical and conference translators and interpreters, among others areas, helping to prioritize texts for translation/interpreting and by demonstrating that translation or interpreting is not merely going from one language to another but is a complex task requiring in-depth knowledge and expertise of both source and target discourses.

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