



Interpreting Pragmatic Meaning In Cultural Contexts

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Abstract

Generally, translating pragmatic meanings, namely implied meanings, never seems an easy task for translators because of the interference of different factors. Besides, matters become more harder when these implied meanings are used in religious discourses where cultural factors exert their impact forcefully. This stimulates this study to investigate the problems of translating implied meanings in Shiite discourse. As such, the study aims at finding out the most apparent problems that may encounter translators in this regard. the study hypothesized that achieving the equivalence of implied meanings in the target text entails utilizing particular techniques. the study has come with some findings and recommendations.

1. Introduction

In his preface, Catford (1978: vii) translation is an activity of enormous importance in the modern world and it is a subject of interest not only to linguists, professional and amateur translators and language teachers, but also to electronic engineers and mathematicians.

The process of translating ST is not an easy task. As regards religious texts, they bring with them specific problems for the translator, especially concerning intertextuality, rhetorical devices unfamiliar to most English speaking readers and, above all, the connotative and affective aspects of Islamic terminology so consistently used by Islamist writers to persuade their Arabic readership of the truth, moral justification and even inevitability of their arguments. It will be edifying to see how or even if the translators attempt to overcome these problems and with what degree of success (Faiq 2004).

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2. Translation

Translation has been tackled by a variety of scholars with their focus on the notion of replacement. For example, Nida and Taber (1969: 12) state that translation involves reproducing meaning and style of the source language in the target language as naturally equivalent as possible. For Catford (1965: 20) and Meetham and Hudson (1972: 713), translation is the replacement of a text in one language by a replacement of an equivalent text in a second language. In a similar way, Bell (1991: 5-6) sees it as the replacement of the semantic and stylistic equivalences of the source in the target language.

As these definitions illustrate, no clear indication has been made to functional or pragmatic replacement of the source language to the target one. In addition, these views represent the basis of those theories of translation that tackle this communication process somehow wrongly.

2.1. Types of Translation

Generally speaking, translations can be classified into literal (or semantic) and non-literal (or pragmatic) ones. What follows shed light on these two perspectives.

2.1.1. Literal translation

To start with literal translations, it is also known as word-to-word translation (11). For Newmark (1981: 39), this type of translation is semantic one whereas Nida calls it as formal by which an attempt is done to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original. Such perspective suffers from neglecting some influential factors including text type, audience or purpose of translation. We have all come across translations where the vocabulary of a given language may well be recognizable and the grammar intact, but the sense is quite lacking (Hatim and Munday, 2004: 14). As a result of such perspective, translation is seen as simply a question of replacing the linguistic units of the ST (source text) with "equivalent" TL units without reference to factors such as context or connotation (32).

2.1.2. Non-Literal Translation

As a reaction to this literal replacement of the source language to the target one, another approach comes to existence. Newmark calls it 'communicative translation' while Nida prefers to call it 'dynamic translation'. For them, this translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the original (33). For House's (1977: 194, 5), this type of translation is best categorized as 'covert translation'. It enjoys the status of an original ST (source text) in the target culture". It is 'covert' because "it is not marked pragmatically as a TT (translated text) of an ST but may, conceivably, have been created in its own right". Furthermore, covert translations "have direct target

language addressees, for whom this TT is as immediately and 'originally' relevant as ST is for the source language addressees" (Gutt, 1991: 47).

Pragmatic translation entails the existence of equivalence between source-language text and target-language text (Koller, 1995: 186). In this regard, House (1977: 37) stresses a functional equivalence, that is, the translation should match the original text in function, where 'function' is to be understood as the application or use which the text has in the particular context of a situation. For Gutt (1991: 97), this functional equivalence is, however, difficult to achieve because differences of the sociocultural norms have to be taken into account. On his part, Pöchhacker (2004: 97) talks about the principle of "equivalence of sense", that is, the speaker's intention for the original act of discourse equals the interpreter's perception of the intended sense, which in turn becomes the interpreter's intention for the target discourse, which equals the client's perception of the intended sense.

3. Translating Implied Meanings

Pragmatics is primarily concerned with how language is used in communication, particularly with the way meaning is conveyed and manipulated by the participants in a communicative situation. In other words, pragmatics deals with 'speaker's meaning' and the way it is interpreted by the hearer(s), in what is known as 'implied meaning' (Palumbo, 2009: 89) In translation, the implied meaning can be seen as one kind or level of equivalence between a ST and TT at which can be established. Pragmatics is the study of language in use. It is the study of meaning, not as generated by the linguistic system but as conveyed and manipulated by participants in a communicative situation (Baker, 2011: 230). Implied meanings, as in the case of implicatures, are both language- and culture-specific relates to norms of discourse organization and rhetorical functions in different languages (Baker, 2011: 247). Such meanings have an important role in our personal interactions since we usually understand what others are saying, even when people don't express their intentions straightforwardly.

Now, it might undoubtedly be argued that the reason why saying the same thing in the ST does not carry the same implicated meanings in the TT with the lack of shared background knowledge between the two languages. Following Toury (1980), source text (ST)-oriented theories of translation, according to which a translation is not a translation unless it conveys everything that the original conveyed, find themselves in difficulty when trying to account for the existence of things which are called translations but which, in the terms of the theories, would have to be defined as non-translations. This notion has been supported by Hickey (1998: 35), the implied meaning has not been translated and, therefore, that this text part has not been translated at least not completely. The literal meaning has been translated, but the implied meaning has not. In addition, Baker (2011: 259) stresses this idea via stating that while other things being equal,

what is conversationally implicated in the ST should remain conversationally implicated in the TT.

4. Obstacles of Translating Implied Meaning

The issue of remaining conversationally implicated might not be an easy task of translators due to certain obstacles.

1. Failure to render the conventional meanings of words and structures of the source language to the target one. Such failure may affect the calculability of implicatures in the target text (Baker, 2011: 240). In addition, languages also have conventionalized expressions and patterns and typographic features of conveying implicatures. Problems arise in translation when the functions of such patterns and features are not recognized and a literal or near-literal transfer of form distorts the original implicature or conveys a different one (Baker, 2011: 240,2).
2. The inability or ignorance to identify references to participants, entities, events and practices. An accurate identification of such reference bridges the gap between the textual world and the world of the target reader. Besides, it enables readers of the target text to interpret the particular associations it triggers and to draw any intended implicatures (Baker, 2011: 243,4):

(والله ما معاوية بادهى مني، ولكنه يغدر ويفجر...)

By Allah, Mu`awiyah is not more cunning than I am, but he deceives and commits evil deeds. (Sermon 200)

3. Non-universality of the Co-operative Principle and its maxims in different languages. In this regard, Thomson (1982:11) considers the possibility that a certain type of implicature, say quality implicature, is never used by the speakers of a particular language, or that the contexts in which a type of implicature will be used will differ from one language community to the next. This means that the maxims do not have the same value in different cultures, but they are both language- and culture-specific (Baker, 2011: 245).
4. Cultural references are language/culture-specific. They can be exotic or emotive expressions and can either be transliterated or borrowed into the target language. Most cultural expressions are translation resistant. Some cultural expressions, however, can be linguistically tamed and naturalized into the target language, such as the Arabic expression bukhuur, which can be rendered into English as (air freshener), or the English expression (toothbrush) which could have been naturalized as miswaak in Arabic. But these are instances of cultural transplantation (Abdul-Raof, 2004:104):

(فأما انا فوالله دون ان اعطي ذلك ضرب المشرفية تطير منه فراش الهام)

But for me, before I allow it I shall use my sharp edged swords of al-Mushrafiyyah which would cut as under the bones of the head and fly away arms and feet. (Sermon 34)

5. Some other important issues can contribute to the failure of translating implicatures. These include that the source-language concept is not lexicalized in the target language:

(والله ليشردنكم في اطراف الارض حتى لا يبقى منكم الا قليل كالكحل في العين...)

By Allah, he will disperse you throughout the earth till only a few of you remain, like **kohl** in the eye. You will continue like this till the Arabs return to their sense.

(Sermon 138)

6. The source-language word is semantically complex. The source-language word may be semantically complex.
7. The source and target languages make different distinctions in meaning. The target language may make more or fewer distinctions in meaning than the source language. What one language regards as an important distinction in meaning another language may not perceive as relevant (20).
8. The target language lacks a superordinate. The target language may have specific words (hyponyms) but no general word (superordinate) to head the semantic field. The target language lacks a specific term (hyponym). Differences in physical or interpersonal perspective, in expressive meaning and form.
If **the Persians** see you tomorrow they will say, "He is the root (chief) of Arabia. If we do away with him we will be in peace." (Sermon 146)
9. The context, linguistic or otherwise, of the utterance in which an utterance occurs determines the range of implicatures that may sensibly be derived from it. Apart from the actual setting and the participants involved in an exchange, the context also includes the co-text and the linguistic conventions of a community in general (Baker, 2011: 249). The inability to relate a piece of information to his or her own context can lead the reader to draw the wrong inferences from a text.
10. Other items of background knowledge appear important to make sense of any piece of information presented in a text, the reader or hearer has to be able to integrate it into some model of the world, whether real or fictional. Text-presented information can only make sense of it can be related to other information we already have. A text may confirm, contradict, modify or extend what we know about the world, as long as it relates to it in some way (Baker, 2011: 258).

5. Suggested Solutions

As a result of these obstacles, there appears an irreconcilable tension between translators' task of remaining conversationally implicated in the target language and taking care of these difficulties. Therefore, the solution of this problem is not possible at most cases. In spite of this, some solutions are claimed in this regard. For instance, Baker (2011: 259) suggests providing more explanations and details

in case of lacking access to the necessary background information, features of the context and so on to work out any implied implicatures. On his behalf, Jacobsen (2002) in Fowler, et al. (2013: 410) suggests that interpreter-mediated communication, among them are translators, cannot take place without additions and explications in order to bridge the gap between speakers of different languages. Therefore, She suggests that interpreters either interpret the semantic content and explain the implicature, or interpret the semantic content and explain part of the implicature, or interpret part of the semantic content and explain part of the implicature.

In sum, I believe that the notion of translating implied meanings is as applicable to Shiite discourse translation as it is to language use in general, but it cannot account for all instances of translation. Nevertheless, many translational phenomena can be described fairly systematically using concepts and descriptive terms borrowed from it.

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