Eighth International Conference on
Education, Language Instruction and Technology – ELIT-2020

Formal transfer in language contact vs. semantic transfer in translation

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Abstract.
The research presented in this paper investigates and contrasts the aspects and challenges of linguistic transfer as manifested in the situations of language contact vs. translation. The paper's sections focus on outlining and distinguishing between the formal and semantic mechanisms of linguistic transfer by illustrating them with particular challenge-posing examples. The discussed examples in the paper explore the challenges of translating realia, rendering reflected meaning, and transferring intralinguistic meaning in the contexts of text translation vs. movie subtitles translation.

Based on the discussed examples, the paper concludes that although the formal linguistic transfer occurring in language contact situations is a far less challenging task than the semantic linguistic transfer as the essence of translation, both the formal and semantic mechanisms of linguistic transfer are equally complex processes.

Keywords: linguistic transfer, language contact, translation, realia, reflected meaning, intralinguistic meaning.

I. Introduction

The chosen tertium comparationis for the purposes of this paper is the process of linguistic transfer, and the paper investigates and contrasts the aspects in which the general phenomenon of linguistic transfer manifests in the cases of language contact and in translation. The most basic dichotomy of linguistic transfer in the situations mentioned is into formal transfer vs. semantic transfer, respectively. The subsequent sections are focused on contrasting the formal and the semantic linguistic transfer in the cases of language contact and translation.

II. Formal Linguistic Transfer – Language Contact

In language contact, transfer may occur either internally, or externally, i.e. either within the overall language repertoire in the mind of a single bilingual or multilingual speaker, or during interaction between speakers of different languages. In both of the mentioned cases of language contact, however, the type of transfer involved is formal.

1. Transfer within a bilingual or a multilingual's overall language repertoire

Linguistic transfer within a bilingual or a multilingual's overall language repertoire is defined as "the process by which a bilingual or multilingual speaker makes or attempts to make creative communicative use of elements of the combined, full repertoire of linguistic structures in a context that requires selection from just a subset of the repertoire" (Matras, 2009). In other words, the process of linguistic transfer here amounts to deliberate codeswitching on the part of the speaker with the aim to achieve a particular stylistic communicative effect. In this case, the type of transfer involved is formal, not semantic – i.e. linguistic structures (words, phrases, or sentences) are deliberately inserted (transferred) within the discourse of the speaker without altering the overall semantic content of their speech.

2. Transfer during interaction between speakers of different languages

In the case of interaction between speakers of different languages, the type of transfer involved is again formal (not semantic). Depending on the intensity of the contact between the two interacting groups of speakers, the transfer of linguistic structures involves a scale from borrowing single linguistic items to assimilating whole syntactic patterns that may even lead to major structural and typological changes in the respective language.

III. Semantic Linguistic Transfer – Translation

As A. Danchev points out, the usage of the terms 'transfer' and 'translation' is "frequently overlapping". *(Danchev, 1982)* This is a fact, because translation in its essence as a phenomenon of meaning transfer is an instance of linguistic transfer, and more specifically – an instance of semantic linguistic transfer.

Translation is a specific type of mediation and transfer activity between languages and cultures. It presupposes that translators should have a high level of competence in both the source and target languages, as well as a solid knowledge of both cultures between which they are mediating. But this activity also requires a great deal of effort, skill and determination on the translators' part in order to be able to successfully overcome the challenges of transfer with which this activity presents them every step of the way.

Performing this activity on its own is always a challenge; but this challenge is the end product – the sum total – of a number of greater or smaller challenges that are due to different factors in the different contexts. Some of these challenge-posing factors include, for example, the lack of equivalence between source and target language that reflects the absence of corresponding concepts in the two cultures. Another factor may be the impossibility of rendering the same effect, produced by simultaneously evoking two meanings of a polysemous word in the source language, because these two meanings in the target language are expressed by two different words. Yet another factor can be the impossibility to render the meaning that arises from relations between signs within the source language system. Respectively, these three factors pose the challenges of **translating realia, rendering reflected meaning and transferring intralinguistic meaning**.

These three challenges will be explored below by comparing text translation to movie subtitle translation where things are even further complicated because of the requirement for conciseness of expression, because language is used in the form of dialogue and because translators are deprived of the option to use any explanatory notes whatsoever.

TRANSLATING REALIA

Realia are defined as *"words and combinations of words denoting objects and concepts characteristic of the way of life, the culture, the social and historical development of one nation and alien to another" (Florin, 1993).* In other words, for translation these are source culture-specific concepts, which are in most cases absent as such in the target culture. Therefore, since also no linguistic equivalence can be established, realia require special translation approaches to address this challenge.

In text translation, according to S. Florin, several strategies for translating realia can be employed – transliteration + footnote explanation; introduction of a loan word or calque in the target language; approximate translation; use of a functional equivalent; description; or contextual translation. Thus, translators can, for example, transliterate the Bulgarian *"мартеница"* into English and explain what it is in a footnote; they can render the English *"skyscraper"* through the calque *"небостъргач"* in Bulgarian; they can use the more general approximate translation *„чаша минерална вода"* in Bulgarian instead of specifying what type of mineral water it is for *"a glass of vichy"* (provided this is not of particular importance in the context); they can use the Bulgarian functional equivalent *„индиански лопен"* for the unfamiliar flower *"Indian paintbrush"*; they can describe a phenomenon without rendering an exact equivalent word; or they can substitute the entire unfamiliar context for an acceptable familiar one.

In movie subtitle translation, the strategies for rendering realia are notably fewer than the ones in text translation for obvious reasons. Transliteration could not be employed because the concept would remain completely unfamiliar due to the impossibility of using footnotes. Description is also not an option because of the conciseness of expression requirement. Use of calques and loan-words, approximate translation, functional equivalents and contextual translation are, however, all acceptable strategies to rendering realia in movie subtitle translation (provided they are appropriate for the context; even more so if they contribute to the conciseness of expression).

Subtitle translation strategies for rendering realia – examples:
Approximate translation:
(Smallville, Episode 10x09 – "Patriot")
Lois Lane: General, I brought something for you.
*Gen. Slade Wilson: Oh, I see I'm not the only one who does their homework. Fine bourbon and **Cuban Cohibas** – my favourite.*
Лоис Лейн: Генерале, имам нещо за Вас.

*Ген. Слейд Уилсън: Явно не съм единственият, който винаги се подготвя. Отлежал бърбън и **кубински пури** – любимите ми.*
Functional equivalent:
(House M.D., Episode 7x01 – "Now what")
*House: Wow. I didn't think you'd take my lack of **board game** skills so personally.*
*Хаус: Уау. Не мислех, че ще приемеш липсата ми на умения да играя **скрабъл** толкова лично.*

RENDERING REFLECTED MEANING

Reflected meaning is defined as *"the meaning which arises in cases of multiple conceptual meaning, when one sense of a word forms part of our response to another sense" (Leech, 1974)*. In other words, this is the effect produced when two or more senses of a polysemous word are simultaneously evoked in the mind of the message recipient.

According to Leech, one sense of a word reflects upon another when it is dominantly suggestive either because it is frequently used and relatively familiar, or because of the strength of its associations and emotive suggestions. In any case, this is a wide-spread phenomenon, which is often deliberately evoked to produce a certain effect. It also poses a serious challenge for translation, because in most cases the different senses of one polysemous word from the source language are rendered through separate words in the target language.

Both in text translation and in movie subtitle translation, the challenge may be addressed in several possible ways: one is to translate the discrete senses of the word in the respective equivalents from the target language, though in this way the effect of using one and the same word in several senses will be destroyed; another is to try to find a suitable polysemous functional equivalent in the target language, in which case the effect of using one and the same word in several senses will be preserved, though, usually, to the partial detriment of the original conceptual meaning (this approach is acceptable in contexts where it is more important to preserve the effect, rather than the exact conceptual meaning); a third option is to use the strategy of contextual translation and create the same effect anew with a completely different polysemous word in its completely different senses; this option, however, is suitable to be used only in cases when it is crucial to preserve the effect, but there is no close functional equivalent in the target language. In some cases, of course, it is possible to preserve both the conceptual meaning and the one polysemous word effect.

Subtitle translation strategies for rendering reflected meaning – examples:
(House, M.D., Episode 7x01 – "Now What")
Preserve the conceptual meaning, lose the one polysemous word effect:
*House: I can always **tell** when you lie. I mean always.*
Cuddy: I slept with my freshman roommate.
House: A lie.
Cuddy: A truth.
*House: You have **a tell**.*
Cuddy: What is it?
House: First admit that you were lying.
*Cuddy: Fine. I was lying. My sexual history is boring and predictable. What is my **tell**?*
*House: Are you kidding? If I **tell** you your **tell**, you'll get rid of it, then I won't be able to **tell**.*
*Cuddy: Well, then you have to **tell** me something I don't already know about you.*
*House: Even though, technically, you didn't **tell** me something that I didn't already know about you.*
*Cuddy: Quit being so damn logical and just **tell** me.*
*Хаус: Винаги мога да **позная** кога лъжеш. Имам предвид наистина винаги.*
Къди: Спах със съквартирантката си в първи курс.
Хаус: Лъжеш.
Къди: Истина е.
*Хаус: Издаваш се с **подсказка**.*
Къди: Каква е тя?
Хаус: Първо си признай, че излъга.
*Къди: Добре. Излъгах. Сексуалното ми минало е скучно и предсказуемо. Каква ми е **подсказката**?*
*Хаус: Шегуваш ли се? Ако ти **кажа** каква ти е **подсказката**, ще спреш да се **издаваш** и после аз няма да мога да **познавам** кога лъжеш.*
*Къди: Ами тогава ти ще трябва да ми **кажеш** нещо, което все още да не знам за теб.*
*Хаус: Въпреки че, технически, ти не ми **каза** нищо, което вече да не знам за теб…*
*Къди: Спри да философстваш и просто ми **кажи…***
Preserve both the conceptual meaning and the one polysemous word effect:
(House, M.D., Episode 5x10 – "Let Them Eat Cake")
*House: Have you seen my **balls**?*
Cuddy: (on the telephone) Can you hold on a second?

*House: My **balls**. Have you seen my **balls**? The giant one and the red one…*
Cuddy: Your plan isn't gonna work.
House: Of course it is. I try to make you miserable to make you leave, you deny that it's making you miserable and you try to make me miserable so I stop making you miserable and eventually you will leave citing reasons that have nothing to do with misery.
Cuddy: You're not bothering me.
House: Step one – completed.
*Cuddy: (on the telephone) I'm gonna call you from my cell. (to House) And then I will come back in here…(calling from her cell phone) Hey…yeah…I just had to explain to him that I had his **balls** and he is not getting them back!!! (to House) Excuse me.*
*Хаус: Да си ми виждала **топките?***
Къди: Бихте ли изчакали за секунда?
*Хаус: **Топките** ми. Да си ми виждала **топките**? Гигантската и червената…*
Къди: Планът ти няма да проработи.
Хаус: Разбира се, че ще проработи. Опитвам се да ти вгорча живота, за да се махнеш, а ти отричаш, че ти вгорчавам живота и се опитваш да вгорчиш моя, за да спра аз да вгорчавам твоя и в крайна сметка ще се махнеш, позовавайки се на причини, които нямат нищо общо с вгорчаването на живота.
Къди: Не ме дразниш.
Хаус: Стъпка първа – изпълнена.
*Къди: Ще Ви се обадя от мобилния си… И после ще се върна тук. Здравейте…да… просто трябваше да му обясня, че **топките** му са у мен и няма да си ги получи!!! Извини ме.*

TRANSFERRING INTRALINGUISTIC MEANING:

Intralinguistic meaning is defined as *"the meaning arising from the relations between the signs within a linguistic system" (Barkhudarov, 1975)*. According to Barkhudarov, intralinguistic meaning includes, for example, sound patterns like alliteration, assonance and rhyme; relations of synonymy or antonymy; grouping of linguistic signs into semantic fields, etc. Preserving intralinguistic meaning is the greatest challenge for the translator, because sound patterns and particular meaning relations are exclusively language and culture-peculiar features.

In rendering intralinguistic meaning, the translator very often needs to resort to compensatory mechanisms like, for example, compensate for one manifestation of intralinguistic meaning by another (eg. compensate for alliteration by using rhyme, or compensate for alliteration by using the original rhythmical pattern: ***eg. Oscar Wilde's "Pen, Pencil and Poison" has been translated into Russian as „Кисть, перо и отрава"***); substitute one paradigm of relations for another to preserve the effect; even rewrite a work with a completely different conceptual meaning if what is essential is preserving the original manifestation of the intralinguistic meaning.

Transferring intralinguistic meaning is an equally challenging task both for text translation and movie subtitle translation.

IV. Conclusion

As demonstrated by the contrastive analysis of formal vs. semantic linguistic transfer, formal linguistic transfer occurring in situations of language contact is far less challenging, but nonetheless complex a process than semantic linguistic transfer as the essence of translation in general. The further contrastive analysis of strategies for transferring 3 of the most challenging types of meaning in text translation vs. movie subtitle translation additionally explicates and stresses the complexity of the translator's task.

The combination of both contrastive analyses presented in this paper sought to demonstrate and stress the complexity of the phenomenon of linguistic transfer in general, regardless of its particular formal or semantic manifestation.

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