

Cultural Transfer through Translation: Turkish Samples

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Abstract

When the concepts belonging to humanity are aligned, culture is a phenomenon that should be considered first hand. However it is not easy to define what the concept of culture is. Culture implies various features in itself and one of the most significant features of culture is language. Language is considered to be a tool enabling the cultural transfer among people via some sources. One of these crucial sources facilitating this cultural transfer among people from different cultures is translation. In this sense, in this paper, firstly the concepts of culture, language and translation are discussed, then the relation among these concepts are examined in a holistic frame and finally the translation samples are presented in the context of cultural transfer.

Keywords: Culture, Language, Translation, Foreign Language Teaching.

Culture, which can be assumed as a living entity, has an interaction and evolution in itself. There have been many definitions and views on determining what culture is. According to Scovel (1991) culture is the social cement of whole human relations and it is the common point that we find ourselves. Scarcella (1992:183) defines culture as the entire of the gained behaviors that were socially acquired. Culture can also refer to the humans' life style as a whole (Chastain, 1998:302). Accordingly, culture is a phenomenon which will go on living as human kind exists and will be transferred to next generations with the help of language. In other words, culture is the connection of many passageways where the passengers attempt to learn their own and others' directions throughout the life. As it can be inferred that culture is the accumulation of knowledge which passes through the filter of acquisition persisting throughout the life. In this sense, language is the main tool guiding people in the crossroads of culture.

Language and culture are the inseparable parts of the whole since this accumulation and transfer of knowledge is merely possible with language. Thus, language and culture totally affect each other, the people and the communities living all over the world. Since culture and language are in each other's pocket, it is not easy to decide which one is the part of the other. As Kramsch states out language and culture are bound to each other and cannot be separated. Namely, neither language nor culture can exist without the existence of the other (1993:113). Damen (1987:12) declares that language should be culture related and culture specific, for the purpose of comprehending a message that has been conveyed. Then both language and culture are like the mirrors reflecting the values of any society.

Languages are learned for communication and communication can be realized by getting awareness of cultural items. In language teaching and learning environments, language can be considered as a tool used for conveying meaning as well, but meaning is typically obtained by cultural awareness. In contrary, language teaching deprived of cultural elements can be based on solely teaching words and structures. Such an approach may be totally redundant for learners. In recent years, international communication is developing rapidly and this inevitably leads to the rise of new concepts. Some of these concepts are multiculturalism and multilingualism which are envisaged by the language philosophy within the frame of adaptation to European Union. To this, citizens in a nation should know several foreign languages and at the same time should gain information about their cultures. Such a tendency requires being commonsensical and tolerant to other cultures as well as having knowledge about other countries. In this sense, culture teaching provides learners to recognize the fact that social variables can affect people's conversations and behaviors. Namely, by culture teaching, increasing the awareness of cultural differences is primarily aimed. Another reason is to provoke intellectual cu-

iosity of learners about the target language and to create tolerance on people speaking the target language. By doing this, negative attitudes and prejudices towards other cultures can be demolished.

In this common sense, it seems inevitable to face an unconscious cultural transfer via language teaching. As language teaching and culture are inseparable components, cultural elements such as life-style, customs and clothing need also be taught. It cannot be disregarded that a phenomenon becomes meaningful on the condition that it serves a specific purpose. In this context, choosing appropriate topics related with the aim of the courses and learners' expectations seem to be essential. It is generally acknowledged that translation courses are among those in which culture transfer is carried out and cultural items are distinguished.

Cultural Transfer through Translation

In a simple sense, translation is an action of converting any text of any source language into the equivalent text in the target language or an action of transferring the meaning of a text into a different language as possible as it can be. However, an exact transfer of the words or finding out the synonyms of those in the target language is not always possible due to the differences among languages. The achievement of translation is based merely on deep and extensive studies.

Translation is the transfer tool of not only the written, but also the oral language consisting cultural components. In that case, translation comes upon with the function of transferring languages and cultures. This process occurs simultaneously, that is, culture and language are not presented independently in translation process. Translation, thus, is a process that brings about the processes of cultural de-coding, re-coding, en-coding and multicultural considerations in increasing degrees.

It cannot be disregarded that cultural identity is the influential factor in constructing the specificity of a certain society which leads to cultural turn. Such a turn can chiefly be figured out via the concept of translation due to the fact that translation is a vehicle for introducing the qualifications of culture such as life style, customs, ideology of other nations, and so on. The need to translate will rise when the desire to know the different people and cultures increases. In this concept, with the help of accurate and qualified translations, nations may develop their point of view and be able to destroy the prejudices and develop positive attitudes towards otherness. To increase the quality of translation, education process needs to be well planned.

Translation and Education

While planning education process, the questions whether the main aim is to teach the languages by translation or to teach the translation by languages need to be taken into consideration. The variety of possible answers to those questions may determine the purpose and teaching techniques. A teaching plan may also be figured out considering the result. The most significant factor should be the consistency of the goal as in all related areas in language teaching. Seleskovitch (1985:162-165) suggests that teaching a language is to teach stable elements of that language, to teach how to translate is to enable learners to comprehend that most of the equivalents in text context are unique. Moreover, teaching a foreign language by translation leads the learners to discover the unexpected and striking aspects of the foreign language. If the purpose is to teach a foreign language, the content of the course needs to be designed by regarding the main focus of the language learnt. Because the differences between the target and the native languages can enchant learners and then it would be possible, by breaking the prejudices, to turn towards the nature of the language by comprehending its form, narrative style, strangeness and qualifications.

On the other hand, learners are also expected to have background information about the subject that will be taught. It would be futile if learner does not know some specific issues about the culture of the target language. Therefore learners can learn how to collect data and how to make research on the related topics in order to defeat some complexities.

Obstacles of Translation as an Intercultural Communication

Translation, in general sense, is accepted as an intercultural communication which has direct affiliation with the transformation of culture by means of different text types. By considering the types of the texts to be translated, various strategies and purposes can be imposed on learners. In this sense, both source and target languages are the focal points of translation process. Because text types have distinctive language functions, and translation of a certain text type must successfully perform the language function (Colina, 2003:15). Among the language items, with respect to acceptability of translation, culturally appropriate words or word groups are the most striking ones to be intensified while translating. But some groups of words or text types may create obstacles during the translation process. Among these, culture specific food names, religious items, historical and national points, proverbs are the most remarkable ones.

- Intercultural differences are one of the most central issues that should be taken into consideration in the translation process. In several occasions some terms, words, sentences or phrases belong to source language cannot be easily translated into target language. Such disabilities in the cultural translation occur when there is not the exact synonym of it in target language. For instance, the names of some foods in Turkish culture such as **karniyarik**, **imambayıldı**, **kadınbudu köfte**, **vezir parmağı**, **dilber dudağı**, **hanım göbeği**, **analı kızlı**, **kol böreği**, **ali nazik**, **yengen**, **sütlü Nuriye**, **dul avrat çorbası**, etc. which totally carry different and absurd meanings when they are translated into other languages. Among these, for instance, the meal **karniyarik** can be translated as *ventral split*, or the sweet **dilber dudağı** as *the lip of beautiful girl* into English. Similarly some terms in English such as **hamburger**, **hot-dog** and **pizza** cannot be equally translated into Turkish (Köksal, 2005:10-11). These terms and names specifically belong to the culture of the societies in which they are used. While translating these words, the translator may convey the words in original forms and clarify the meaning of such words by giving extra explanations and footnotes or presenting similar words that fit to the meaning of them.
- A comparison can also be made between the religious concepts such as **Ramazan**, **Kurban** in Turkish or **Christmas (Noel)** in English. In order to translate such cultural words there is a need to learn all the associated terms and concepts related to “Kurban and Kurban Bayramı” (a religious ceremony) and besides it is necessary to know what it means in the semantic dimension (Bozkurt, 1982:5-13). When the words Ramazan and Kurban are translated into English, for the readers from other cultures, the words can be used in original forms, but some details can be added into the translation. For instance, the former one means to avoid from eating and drinking during specific time of the day, and the latter one refers to a tradition of ancient times whose roots are linked with the pagan ceremony but has an altered application now. In a text translated from English into Turkish, Christmas -Noel- can simply be translated as ‘a vacation before the New-year’ for a Turkish reader. The relation with the birth of Christ may also be understood by the reader. However the word ‘Christmas’ carries further and deeper meanings for a Christian.
- Some other facts should also be considered when there is a tendency to use the information out of the text. When a reader faces some unknown concepts in a text related with the target language, the reader can make generalizations from the whole text in order to clarify the meaning of those concepts and words. In order to mention about the essential points and to present the necessary information to readers, translator may make use of extra information out of the text. For instance, in two different translations (into Turkish) of the Gustave Flaubert’s novel **Madame Bovary**, it is possible to see that two translators dealt with different points in the text and presented footnotes such as **üç renk** (three colours) as the **three colours of the French flag**, **Saint-Germain** as **the district where the nobel people of Paris are living**, **trikornunu göğsüne dayıyor** (tricorn) as **a hat having an angular shape**, and **yarım ons arkansonla** (arcanson) as **a kind of rosin** (Günay 2003:108-109).
- Cultural transfer can also be achieved by using the historical texts; yet it would be difficult to translate them appropriately. For instance, one of the masterpieces of English literature **Beowulf** written in the Anglo-Saxon language can be hard or impossible even for the native speakers of English to understand it if they do not have a knowledge of that language. However this obstacle will be destroyed when the translated version into modern English is used

(Alyaz: 1994). In this sense, historical texts may lead to obstacles but create a convenient atmosphere for cultural translation and also enable the learners to enjoy the foreign language learning courses.

- Teaching the specific collocations in the target language by translation also helps to transfer cultures. Proverbs, the collocations reflecting the past memories, feelings, beliefs, and life philosophy of a community, are the ones that belong to this category. This means that one can learn a lot about the culture of a language by analyzing the proverbs. In this context it would be beneficial to have a look at the translation of some proverbs by comparing the Turkish and the English equivalents: ***a cat may look at a king~ bakan göze yasak olmaz, if for penny, in for a pound- battı balık yan gider, many a mickle makes a muckle- damlaya damlaya göl olur, let bygones be bygones- eski çamlar bardak oldu, the choice and the loveable lack no suitors- damda pekmezin olsun, sinek Bağdat'tan gelir.***
- When these samples are analyzed it is obvious that the translation of proverbs is a hard process to achieve; besides it is completely impossible to make a direct translation of those. Some concepts used in a culture do not exist in another. Therefore, the translation of such proverbs can be achieved in meaning level and this may boost the cultural transfer for an utmost position.
- Among the most difficult tasks of translator is to translate poems, particularly the ones comprising cultural items. Mallarme and Valery mention about the impossibility of exact translation and they assume that these translations can never reflect the real meaning (Rifat, 1981:47). However poem translation by an expert is one of the most essential tools, as other literary genres, in transferring the cultural issues belong to the source language into target language. The poem below by Langston Hughes focuses on racial discrimination. This poem is presenting some key points about the culture of the language it belongs to.

BEN DE

Ben Amerika türküsünü söylüyorum.
Ben esmer kardeşiniz.
Misafirler geldiği zaman
Mutfağa dehliyorlar yemekte beni.
Ama ben buna gülüyorum
Karnımı doyuruyorum güzelce
Büyüyüp kuvvetleniyorum.

Yarın

Masanın başına geçip oturacağım
Misafirler geldiği zaman
Kimse cesaret edip de
“ Hadi sen mutfakta ye “
Diyemiycek.

Güzel görecekler beni
Utanacaklar da...

Ben de Amerika'yım.

EPILOGUE

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,

I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
“Eat in the kitchen,”
Then.
Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed,-
I, too, am America.

Turkish: Melih Cevdet Anday(1996) by Langston Hughes

When we look through the quality of the translation, it is obvious that the items, words and sentences are closely interrelated with the original text. And the effort of the translator in transferring the cultural elements by using his own knowledge and ability is obvious since this piece resembles the original poem as a mirror reflecting the same vision but with a change in the order and the kind of words due to language structure. With its basic elements, this poem is shedding light on the time period it belongs to and reflecting the poet's inner feelings. One who does not know anything about the poet or the period can also understand the content of this poem. It can easily be understood that there is hegemony of a racist ideology in America. With more detailed study extensive information about that period, and the main characteristics of the poet's other pieces will possibly be achieved. The poem can be analyzed by considering the key or main issues of the period that it was written in, since it is not possible to say that the main phenomenon of the American culture is the racism. Additionally, both educators and readers are expected to have the necessary qualities about the content of the subject and should have the required equipment and material to facilitate an exact cultural transfer.

Conclusion

Language and culture are two concepts which are strictly interrelated. It is impossible to mention about one of these concepts when the other is absent. Several ways are available to transfer a language and its culture into another language and one of the most important and effective of those is translation. A translation which is poor in content and not reflecting the appropriate meaning not only be regarded as ineffective but also be defined as unsuccessful to achieve its goal. Thus, translators are responsible not only for the quality and the content of translation but also for the acceptability in intercultural sense in order to achieve the target qualifications and aims of translation process.

On the other hand, the educators in foreign language teaching surroundings is responsible for finding out the appropriate texts including the necessary qualities translations in intercultural standpoint. A text lack of cultural aspects would not be helpful in this process. The roles of learners are to make an introductory search and involve in the cultural norms of both source and target languages. In this context, texts are not the only tools for achieving the cultural transfer and there are various options to serve for reaching that aim. Thus, a bridge can be constructed between the cultures of foreign and native languages via texts, and the similarities and the differences between those can be described.

The fun of learning and recognizing different cultures and accepting it as a way of life, will be a life long profit that will shape the lives of the learners. An appropriate and qualitative translation can considered to be the most effective way to achieve the cultural transfer among the existing options. For instance, it would not be an appropriate act to give the cultural elements of the language to the learners who wish to learn this foreign language in a short period of time with a single aim. Educators may, then, select the subjects and materials appropriate to the target group that will learn the language.

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