

THINKING ABOUT THE TARGET READER: USING CULTURE-SPECIFIC LEXIS FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *This paper looks at the considerations of the target reader in translation tasks involving culture-specific lexis. Part of a series of studies investigating the translation of such lexis, this paper draws on findings from a pilot study which was conducted on five students learning Korean into English translation. The students were given pre-tasks which required translating a text containing CSL. A taught session which placed emphasis on optimal relevance in translation (Gutt, 2000), and the translation of implicit information (Gutt, 2006) was then held. A post-translation task then followed. Pre and post-interviews were also conducted. Recorded data was transcribed and coded using NVivo software. When a translator translates a text, they have an imagined or implied target reader for whom they are translating the text for. The TT (target text) is similar to a type of reported speech in which the translator reports a message from the source text, forming communicative interaction between one author and the readership. Results show a significant difference in consideration of the target reader in Sessions 1 and 3, which indicates that it is highly likely such considerations were reinforced during Session 2, the taught session, which enabled the students to contemplate optimal relevance in translation and the translation of implicit information. Presenting qualitative excerpts from the data, the current paper aims to highlight the important role translation of culture-specific lexis can play in developing learners' considerations of target reader, which in turn can develop their intercultural awareness and communication skills.*

Keywords: *culture-specific lexis, target reader, intercultural communication, relevance in translation*

1. INTRODUCTION

When a translator translates a text, they have an imagined or implied target reader for whom they are translating the text for. The TT (target text) is a type of reported speech in which the translator reports a message from the source text, forming communicative interaction between one author and the readership. Two participants of this exchange have the role of implied author and implied reader, and these two intratextual participants in the interaction of the ST may also be transferred to the TT and take on the roles of implied author and implied ST reader (Assis Rosa, 2006). The translation of culture-specific lexis, which is rich in connotations and ubiquitous in our everyday lives, requires communicative interaction between the translator and intended target reader. The translation of words which are specific to a culture is a challenge for all translators, and requires knowledge of any connotations the words may contain. The translator will then need the ability to communicate such words and connotations into the target text. Translators need to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and

language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership (Newmark, 1988). In this communicative interaction, translators need to consider how to convey culture-specific lexis in an optimally relevant way.

This paper looks at the considerations of the target reader in translation tasks involving culture-specific lexis. Part of a series of studies investigating the translation of such lexis, this paper draws on findings from a pilot study which was conducted on five students learning Korean into English translation. The students were given pre-tasks which required translating a text containing CSL. A taught session which placed emphasis on optimal relevance in translation (Gutt, 2000), and the translation of implicit information (Gutt, 2006) was then held. A post-translation task then followed. Pre and post-interviews were also conducted. Recorded data was transcribed and coded using NVivo software. The study will present qualitative excerpts from the data.

2. MAIN TEXT

2.1 Background to the study. Intercultural competence in language learning is an area

attracting substantial interest and attention (see for example, Sinicrope *et al.*, 2003 and Daryai-Hansen *et al.*, 2012). Byram and Risager suggest that the competence learners need for successful intercultural communication is

one which enables them to bring the two cultures and cultural identities present in the interaction into a relationship of communication (Byram & Risager 1999:65).

Byram and Risager believe that culture-oriented language-teaching methodology aims to enable the learner to become “a mediator between cultures”, which is essential from a communicative point of view since “it is the mediation which allows for effective communication” (Byram & Risager, 1999:58). The ability to enable language learners to become mediators between cultures can also be achieved through translation, particularly the translation of words which specifically require cultural knowledge of both source and target text languages.

In order to be interculturally competent, one first needs to have an intercultural awareness. According to Baker (2011), intercultural awareness (ICA) is defined as

a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication. (Baker 2011:202).

Therefore, to summarize, learner who are “interculturally aware” or “interculturally competent” are those who are able to draw upon their knowledge to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries while being conscious of how culture-derived aspects can influence such communication.

The relationship between translation and globalization has been an area attracting profound interest in recent years (cf. Cronin, 2003, 2006; Ho, 2008). There is no doubt that there is an important link between intercultural competence and translator competence. Learners dealing with translation (i.e. translation studies students) are often working with one L2 or more, and as such the ‘language learners’ discussed here naturally includes translation studies students or translator trainees.

The discussion of translation competence is not new and has been widely discussed in translation

studies and translator training (Adab, 2000; Alves & Goncalves, 2007; Campbell, 1998; Colina, 2003; Kelly, 2005; PACTE group, 2003, 2011; Presas, 2000; Pym, 2003; Schäffner and Adab, 2000; Way, 2008). The definition of translator competence is far from straightforward, and various models of translator competence have been presented in translator training research (cf. Gile, 2009; Kelly, 1998, 2002, 2005; Neubert, 1994, 2000; PACTE, 2003). It is defined by Kelly as the macro-competence which constitutes the set of skills, knowledge and attitudes which professional translators use (Kelly, 2005), and her model includes communicative and textual competence in at least two languages; cultural competence; subject area competence; instrumental and professional competence; psycho-physiological or attitudinal competence; interpersonal competence and strategic competence. Among these many competences, cultural competence and communicative competence in at least two languages is particularly relevant to today’s translating studies student and L2 learner.

As Hatim and Mason (1990) point out, the translator’s communicative competence is attuned to what is communicatively appropriate in both source language (SL) and target language (TL) communities (Hatim and Mason, 1990:33). Therefore, as L2 learners who are also translating studies students working with the culture of two languages, it is especially important to be communicatively competent. This is directly related to intercultural competence, which is the

ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality (Byram *et al.*, 2002:10).

One area which would enable insight to translators’ mediating roles in translation would be culture-specific lexis (CSL). Cultural references (CRs), or culture-specific items (CSIs), are items in a text which are deemed to be unique to a particular culture, and may pose problems for translation from the source text (ST) into the target text (TT). These items are a challenging area for translation as the way these are dealt with directly affects the finished product – potential problems could be for example, what Venuti (1998) calls the ‘foreignization’, when the characteristics of a text unique to the source text culture are preserved as much as possible at the sake of readability, or on the opposite side, ‘domestication’ of a text. A

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problem translators face is the question of how to deal with cultural aspects which are contained in a source text, and finding the most appropriate way to successfully convey these in the target text.

When a translator translates a text, they have an imagined or implied target reader for whom they are translating the text for. The notion of such a target reader, according to Assis Rosa, is important for translation studies as it will “motivate or constrain the translation process and product (Assis Rosa, 2006:104).

Furthermore Assis Rosa looks at the target text from the perspective of communicative interaction: the TT is a type of reported speech in which the translator reports a message from the source text, forming communicative interaction between one author and the readership. Two participants of this exchange have the role of implied author and implied reader, and these two intratextual participants in the interaction of the ST may also be transferred to the TT and take on the roles of implied author and implied ST reader (Assis Rosa, 2006). The translation of culture-specific lexis, which is rich in connotations, will emphasize communicative interaction between the translator and intended target reader by drawing on Gutt's (2000) relevance-theoretic account of translation, with an emphasis on ‘communication’ and ‘context’. The translation brief will state a target audience and purpose of the text, which will be different for each translation task, to enable exploration of learners’ negotiating and mediating of culture-specific lexis in the texts.

2.2 Research Question. The following question is investigated in this paper: What considerations of target reader were demonstrated in translation tasks involving culture-specific lexis?

2.3 Methodology. The pilot study was conducted on five BA, MA and MPhil students from a Readings in Korean Literature class at SOAS, University of London. The pilot study participants were of differing nationalities: British, German, Norwegian and South Korean. While they were all familiar with Korean culture and were all studying Korean studies-related courses, they were from different courses and were a combination of BA, MA and MPhil students. The L2 speakers of Korean had varying proficiency levels in Korean, although they were all advanced enough to be taking the classes, Readings in Korean Literature (BA and MA), which involved translating Korean literary texts into English every week. Korean news articles about education in South Korea were selected for the study. As all the participants were

from different majors and courses, I wanted to use a text based on a topic they could all relate to. While the text contained culture-specific lexis, no deliberate emphasis was made on these parts of the text. The text for the individual pre and post tasks was from *The Dong-A Ilbo*, a South Korean newspaper, and included various culture-specific lexis related to education, such as “prestigious university”, “In Seoul (universities)” and “SKY”, as well as geographical terms e.g. “Kangnam”. For the group sessions, parts of the text from a *Kyunghyang Shinmun* news article was selected. Again, the article contained various culture-specific lexis related to education, such as “In Seoul (universities)” and “SKY”. The two texts were selected for their similarity in content and CSL content.

The study consisted of three sessions. Session 1 consisted of a pre-task and interview. For the pre-task, participants were asked to translate a part of the text from Korean into English while thinking aloud. As the participants were not familiar with thinking-aloud, practice time was given before starting the translation on various sentences from other texts. After all the participants had done the individual translation task and interview, the taught sessions were scheduled according to participants’ available times. Originally, I had intended to schedule a two-hour taught session which all five participants could attend together. However, due to timetable differences in the end this was not possible. Therefore, I arranged two separate sessions, one with three participants and one with two.

The session looked at the notions of ‘communication’ and ‘context’, derived from Gutt's (2000) relevance theoretic approach to translation. The first part of the session highlighted the background, touching upon first the relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986), and ‘communication’ and ‘context’. Next, implicit information in translation was discussed. Examples were given for both the relevance theory and the translation of implicit information. Emphasis was placed on optimal relevance in translation. Discussion was held regarding the issues of communicating implicit information in translation and contextual relevance when communicating from source text to target text. Participants were then given time to discuss which each other the question “Thinking of the issues of ‘communication’ and ‘contextual relevance’, discussed today, to what extent should implicit information be made explicit?” Such discussion enabled the participants to share their ideas and

also enabled me to check their understanding. While implicit information in translation was discussed, intentional emphasis was made not on CSL itself, but rather the implicit information contained within texts. The discussion did, however, lead naturally to focus on CSL and students were able to express their thoughts on such lexis together.

Once participants had had sufficient time to discuss and express their opinions, they were asked to individually translate a Korean sentence into English, writing the translation onto paper. The sentence contained CSL. When they had finished, one of the participants was asked to read the group their translation, and we discussed what the students thought of the translation. Originally, I had considered doing the “demonstration” myself, but as I was taking on the role of a “teacher” for the taught sessions, I did not want the participants to feel constrained or obliged to follow a certain method or choice of translation. Another discussion then took place, based on the questions: 1) How did you translate the sentence? 2) Would you translate the sentence differently after the demonstration and discussion? This enabled the participants to think more about the way they translated, based on what had been covered and discussed in the session up to that point.

Participants were then given a second small translation task, which was another Korean sentence containing CSL, taken from the same article. When they had all finished, we then talked again about how they had rendered the sentence this time. The discussions enabled the participants to express their own opinions about the topics discussed and share their translations, as well as hear other participants’ views and translations. Post translation tasks and interviews were then scheduled and carried out individually. These also involved a think-aloud translation task in the Korean into English direction, and an interview. Both the texts for translation used for the pre and post tasks specified the same target reader, a British academic magazine.

2.4 Findings and Discussion. This section presents qualitative excerpts from the pre and post interview data in order to investigate the proposed research question. Due to space constraints, this paper will present excerpts from of the participants, Anita and Lucy (pseudonyms).

2.4.1 Anita’s Pre-interview and Task. Excerpt 1 shows how Anita had limited considerations of the target reader during the translation pre-task.

[P: participant R: researcher]

P: Erm...well the feeling about the original articles was that it was pretty dense, so I tried to make it, the English version efficient. And I didn’t use any particularly difficult words, because I think it’s a newspaper article so it should reach out to everyone.

R: So you didn’t use any difficult words, you said?

P: No.

R: Did you notice that it’s for a British academic magazine?

P: No.

R: No? Okay.

P: Hmm... then I would have phrased it differently.

R: In what way, for example?

P: Vocabulary. Hmm. (Anita, Pre-interview)

Even though a translation brief was given in the translation task, Anita did not seem to have registered this, and as such did not consider the target reader much during the task; her considerations of the target text were limited to text style.

2.4.2 Anita’s Post-interview and task

And... there was the question of how to translate ‘SKY’ universities. Considering this is an academic magazine, so it could contain, personally I think it should contain some facts. And so I should not omit it. However in English the sentence gets really long, because I chose to add the top three universities, which is not mentioned in the Korean text.

Okay I was thinking of the target audience, and I didn’t really adjust the language that much because it’s rather straightforward I think, the Korean text. So just kept that tone, but...er...I was, I made sure to add the information. The three universities referred to as ‘SKY’, and then adding the universities to make sure that...let’s say this is an argument that the original writer wants to present. I wanted to keep that argument. (Anita, Post-interview)

As the excerpt from her post interview and task show, although her considerations of the target text seemed to have been limited to text style, in her post interview and task she shows a significant change in considerations of the target reader during the process of translation. She explicitly mentions the reasons for her translation decisions, considering the fact that the translated text was for an academic magazine, and also explicitly stating that she was ‘thinking of the target audience’.

2.4.3 Lucy’s Pre-interview and Task

P: Erm...here I just put ‘kangnamphalhakkwun’ as ‘eight school districts in Kangnam’, and for ‘sowi sukhai myengmwuntay’ [so-called prestigious universities so I’d like to put some small information at the bottom for ‘SKY’, for example

adding explanation about it being the first letters, the acronym of Seoul, Korea and Yonsei university, and the most famous universities.

R: Why do you think it's important to do that?

P: Because if I read the translation 'prestigious universities called SKY', if I'm a foreigner I would not be able to understand what 'SKY' means so I think it's needed. (Lucy, Pre-Interview)

Lucy's pre-interview shows how she showed considerations of the target reader in her translation pre-task. However, her contemplations seem to be limited to whether the reader is 'Korean' or 'foreign'.

2.4.4 Lucy's Post interview and Task

As we talked about during the second session British people are, might be familiar with prestigious universities so I didn't put much information. I just put "SKY is an acronym of top 3 universities in Korea, Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University" but other than that I didn't make other information explicit. (Lucy, Post-interview)

As the excerpt above shows, Lucy shows changes in her translation decision as a direct result of the taught session. She considers the relevance of the information to be communicated and conveyed. As the UK has the concept of 'Oxbridge', she feels that additional information is unnecessary and decides to simply list the names of the university which the CSL 'SKY' stands for.

In the next excerpt, Lucy also explicitly mentions her considering the target reader:

P: Last time I think I should have, I should have made some information explicit but I couldn't. I just translated directly last time and this time I think hmm...I didn't make many sentences explicit but for the parts that it is needed I think I tried to do it.

R: And why did you do that?

P: To help the target audience understand more. (Lucy, Post-interview)

It is interesting to note that while in the pre-interview Lucy had mentioned wanting to add extra information about 'SKY' being the "most famous universities". Following the taught session she thought about the relevance of the information to the British reader, and decided that such additional information would not be needed as "British people might be familiar with prestigious universities".

As the excerpts show, there were considerable changes in the considerations of the target reader

made by the participants. The learners were able to apply what was discussed in the second taught session, which focused on communication and contextual relevance, to their translations. By contemplating the relevance of the information to the target reader, the participants were able to make translation decisions while aiming for effective communication between the source and target text cultures.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The data presented in this paper have highlighted how translation tasks involving the translation of CSL develops and reinforces considerations of the target reader. Through the translation tasks, participants were able to demonstrate considerations of the target reader in a more insightful, in-depth manner. By considering the connotations contained within CSL and how best to communicate these to the target audience, the learners made translation decisions which they believed to be the best choice for the intended target reader.

Although it has its limitations in that the study was of a small scale, it is hoped the paper serves as evidence for the potential role the translation of culture-specific lexis can play in forming and developing learners' considerations of the target reader, in turn developing their intercultural awareness and competence.

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