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FOREIGNIZATION IN TRANSLATION: 
PROMOTING CULTURAL IDENTITY TO GLOBAL WORLD

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Abstract

This paper is aimed at discussing the two strategies mostly debated nowadays concerning culture-specific expressions in translation: domestication and foreignization. Domestication is the strategy used to result in the reader-centered translation, while foreignization is writer-centered. This dichotomy is seen here more as alternatives rather than contradictions. However, the translator, as the decision maker, is not the only agent who chooses which alternative is to be used in translating a certain culture-specific expressions. He works under many considerations and sometimes is 'forced' to take certain path in doing his work. As equivalence is still the main point to achieve in transferring the message of a SL-TL linguistic transfer, foreignization is considered to be more beneficial concerning communication across cultures within the idea of globalization and future interactions among peoples.

Keywords: foreignization, domestication, culture-specific expressions, equivalence

1. Introduction

Translation is no longer viewed as a mere transferring a certain text from one language to the other or expressing one meaning in different words. It has now been moving from translation the message, as equivalently as possible, into a different language to expressing the culture expressed, either explicitly or implicitly, within the language – the choice of words, the structure, the shared values and meaning, the sounds of the words within the readers’ mind, etc.

For quite a long time, translation has been understood as something related only to language, or that it is the aspects of language that are important to be considered in the translation work. Many experts have given their definitions concerning translation (see Catford, 1965; Savory, 1968; Nida and Taber, 1969; Brislin, 1976; or Newmark, 1981). Though many linguistic experts have discussed the unseparated relation between culture and language, translation seemed focused on the meaning equivalence for so many years, emphasizing more on the linguistic aspects rather than the cultural background surrounding the expressions.

2. Domestication and Foreignization

The terms of domestication and foreignization are first introduced by Venuti. Domestication is the orientation to change the 'strange' culture-specific expressions into the ones commonly understood or shared by the target readers. A transparent and fluent style is used intentionally so as to minimize the 'strangeness' of the foreign text for the target language readers. In one side, this strategy will make the translation not like a translation. The target reader will easily follow the information presented in the text, without necessarily thinking hard about the meaning. Here, it may result in the invisibility of the translator; it seems to be no translator at all, because the text is not considered a translation. This is what is called translator’s invisibility by Venuti (1995:1).

According to Baker (2001:242-243), the strategy of foreignization

"...can signify the difference of the foreign text only by assuming an oppositional stance toward the domestic, challenging literary canons, professional standards, and ethical norms in the target language.

...Determining whether a translation project is domesticating or foreignizing clearly depends on a detailed reconstruction of the cultural formation in which the translation is produced and consumed; what is domestic or foreign can be defined only with reference to the changing hierarchy of values in the target language culture. For example, a foreignizing translation may constitute a historical interpretation of the foreign text that is opposed to prevailing critical opinion."

In relation to the various translation methods explained by Newmark (1988: 45-47), domestication is in line with the idiomatic translation and communicative translation, where
the translator focused on transferring the message as equivalent as possible into the target language and adjusting it into the rules of target language. While foreignization is apt to be used in the faithful translation and semantic translation, where the writer’s intention is maintained to be seen and felt by the target readers as it would be for the original-text readers. Here, the translation may keep the ‘strange’ concepts as they are, and giving explanation in footnotes or in brackets to make it easier for the reader to grasp.

Anyway, it should be noted that no translation is the product of absolute domestication or foreignization. No matter what efforts a translator makes, the translated text is always the combination of the two strategies. If the translator employs one method absolutely at any time, his translation will not be considered "excellent translation". Suppose he puts everything from the western culture to idiomatic Chinese words and images, he may violate the purpose of translation, lower the quality of his translation, mislead the reader or even lose the readers.

The translator is the one to decide which strategy is suitable to the work he/she is conducting. But quite often, there are some other factors in one way or another steer the translator in making the decision, such as the publisher, the consumer of the translation work (in what way it is ordered), the policy of the authority, and the text itself (from what type of genre and into what kind of text it is translated).

3. Coping with the Difficulties in Translating Culture-Specific Expressions

As communicating across cultures is more and more common in the era of globalization, translating industry also deals more in the phenomenon of bringing out the uniqueness of one community, one specific culture, to almost all parts of the world. Culture specific expressions may bring problems and difficulties – or better to say challenges – to the translator. Baker divides the difficulties into those at word level and those above word level (see Baker, 1992:26-78).

In dealing with the difficulties of translating the culture-specific expressions, Baker proposes several strategies to achieve equivalence either at or above word level as follows:

a. using a more generic word (superordinate)
b. using a more neutral/less expressive word
c. using cultural substitution
d. using loan word or loan word plus explanation
e. paraphrasing using a related word
f. paraphrasing using unrelated words
g. omitting the expression
h. giving illustration
i. using idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
j. using idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form

Of all the proposed strategies above, only strategies (d) using loan word or loan word plus explanation and (b) giving illustration seemed to be in line with the concept of foreignization, bringing in the ‘other’ culture to the readers’ environment. Paraphrasing may as well refer to a practice of foreignization, but the examples given in Baker (1992:40,73) show more effort in describing the concept in the target readers’ perspective, thus failing to bring alive the ‘other’ culture.

Using loan words with or without further explanation is an effective way of foreignizing in translation. The target readers will be introduced to the ‘foreign’ concept directly and at the same time see the context in which the concept is used.

We can easily find out examples of this loan words in our Bahasa Indonesia, such as komputer, kontrak, film, amlop, hadis, kuantitas, and so on. We cannot borrow any new word from another language, however, as we have a certain policy concerning this strategy. The pronunciation and spelling, for example, have to be adjusted into our language.

In Malaysia, it seems, the strategy of loan words is more flexible. Many words coming from English are adjusted and adopted into Malaysian language, only by changing the spelling to adjust the reading. For example,

- interaktiviti (interactivity),
- kod (code),
- fesyen (fashion),
- konvokesyen (convocation),
- nombor (number), and
- butang (button).

This policy may come from the fact that English is actually not a foreign language there; it is the second language. However, this policy of borrowing may help the layman in Malaysia understand English easier as they are quite familiar with the words, at least orally. Yet this analysis need further and more comprehensive investigation later.

The other strategy, giving illustration is another simple way of translating and presenting the new concept to the target readers. By looking at the illustration, the rough – if not entirely – meaning presented by the writer will be understood. An example is given by Baker (1992:42) in translating the tagged teabag from English into Arabic. The picture saves the translator from lengthy explanation or paraphrase as this concept is new in the target readers.
Figure 1. A tagged teabag

Another example can be seen when Suryainata and Hariyanto (2003:89) explain the difficulty in translating "Peter went up to the housetop to pray" from Greek into Indonesian, moreover into Papua New Guinea, whose concepts of house, as seen in the illustration below.

(a) rumah (Indonesian)
(b) numuno (Papua New Guinea)
(c) oikos (Greek)

Figure 2. Typical houses in several countries

However, when the illustration of the house is given, it is much easier for the readers in Indonesia or in Papua New Guinea (or in other different countries as well) to understand the concept, and at the same time get additional information concerning the culture of the Greek, their typical houses.

4. Conclusions

The importance of cultural considerations has been taken into account in the process of translating text. Ideology in translation will determine which direction is taken in the translation work. Of the two strategies mostly used in translating culture-specific expressions, domestication and foreignization, the later seems to be more promising in relation with the communication across culture as well as for future development of globalization in the real world.

Foreignization in translation may promote a better understanding across different cultures, and in turn help create more balanced attitudes towards various cultures. Despite the unlikeliness of this strategy to be used either fully or absolutely in a translation work, the benefits in may bring should be considered further by the translator, the editor, and, more importantly, the policy maker behind.

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