

Translators and Interpreters as Communicators: Ethics and Tips

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Translators and Interpreters as Communicators: Ethics and Tips

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ABSTRACT: Translation and Interpreting are forms of communication because the two activities are done for an audience, whether they are done online or offline. Translators and interpreters, therefore, are communicators who are responsible for getting across the right message or ideas from the text writers or the speakers to the audience. Errors in translation and interpreting can cause a world disaster as bad as the bombing in Japan in 1945. To avoid such a calamity, there are important points to be followed to render the right meaning in translation and interpreting, such as faithfulness in both written and oral translation and the principle of meaning over form. In interpreting, especially when time is a challenge, there are useful tips to fulfill these important points.

Keywords: faithful, oral and written translation, audience, user-friendly

INTRODUCTION

Translation and Interpreting are forms of communication because both are done for an audience, be it one person or a small group of people or a large group of people or a nation in a specific country or even all people in the world. Translation and interpreting are never done without an audience. Because there is an audience, both are an act of communication which attempts to relay, across cultural and linguistic boundaries, another act of communication (which may have been intended for different purposes and different readers/hearers). The common thread here is communication.... (Hatim and Mason, 1997, pp. 1-2).

Munday (2022: 108) describes interlingual translation as 'translational action from a source text' which 'focuses very much on producing a TT that is functionally communicative for the receiver.'

This means, for example, that the form and genre of the TT must be guided by what is functionally suitable in the TT culture, rather than by merely copying the ST profile. What is functionally suitable has to be determined by the translator, who is the expert in translational action and whose role is to make sure that the intercultural transfer takes place satisfactorily. In the 'translational text operations' ... the ST is analysed solely for its 'construction and function profile' The needs of the receiver are the determining factors for the TT. Thus, as far as terminology is concerned, a technical term in a technical ST may require clarification for a non-technical TT user ... Additionally, in order to maintain cohesion for the TT reader, a single term will normally need to be translated consistently.

To create a translation that is user friendly or easy to understand, the above principles must be paid attention to by translators and interpreters.

In the process of a book of an ST (source text) until the TT (target text) book can be read, there are a lot of people involved. According to Munday (2022: 109), as a communicative process, translations involve a series of roles and players as follows: the initiator, the commissioner, the ST producer, the TT producer, the TT user, and the TT receiver. It is the same with interpretation. The initiator can be the company or individual who needs the translation or interpretation. The commissioner is the individual or agency that contacts the translator or interpreter. The ST producer is the individual(s) within the company who write(s) the ST, and who is/are not necessarily involved in the TT production or the speaker for an event. The TT producer is the translator or interpreter and the translation or interpretation agency or department. The TT user is the person who uses the TT, for example, a teacher using a translated textbook or a salesman using sales brochures. Finally, the TT receiver is the final recipient of the TT, for example, the students using the textbook in the teacher's class or the clients reading the translated sales brochures. Both the TT user and the TT receiver are considered as the audience for the translation and interpretation. Considering these many people involved, this paper aims to discuss and illustrate the necessary points that should be paid attention to in translating and interpreting for an audience in order to produce good translation and interpretation.

METHODS

At the end of every semester students of translation and interpreting classes were asked to write evaluations of the semester they had taken and nearly each of them mentioned that at first, they thought that translation and interpreting were simply changing the languages. Most of them never thought that to convey the ideas in the source text into the target text, there were so many points to be considered. They could not clearly define the point of being faithful in conveying the idea of the source text. They did not understand why meaning was more important than form.

DISCUSSION

The two points were discussed below. Examples are given in order to make the points clear.

Errors in Translation as a Form of Communication

A clear example of an error in translation was the case that caused Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing in Japan in 1945.

In 1945, Japan was weakened to the point of defeat. The 'Big Four' of the allied forces—the U.S., Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the Republic of China—gathered in Potsdam, Germany. They sent their sternly worded terms of surrender to Japanese Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki. If Japan did not meet the terms, the allies threatened "prompt and utter destruction." They waited tensely for a reply, which could determine how World War II would end.

When Japanese media asked what Japan's reply was to be, Premier Suzuki said that they hadn't come to a final decision. For now, they would withhold comment. He used the word *mokusatsu*, a term with a range of meanings from 'remain in a wise and masterly inactivity' to 'withhold comment' to 'ignore with contempt'. When the term *mokusatsu* found its way into the hands of English translators, they translated it as 'ignore with contempt.' This translation mistake, which did not match Suzuki's attitude or intention, circulated among American media, stirring outrage. Ten days later, the decision was made. The B-29 *Enola Gay* headed for Hiroshima, with the bomb aboard. (<https://www.daytranslations.com>)

According to Satwika Rumeksa who also wrote¹⁰ about the translation error in Surya.co.id (Agustus 6, 2010), Suzuki Kantaro's statement was "Seifu wa kore o mokusatsu shi, aku made sensou kanchiku ni maishin suru" and the translation was "Government is ignoring the declaration and until then we still go forward with the war solution." Rumeksa also identifies that the word *mokusatsu* was the word which was not correctly translated. He further explains that a linguist specializing on translation error, Torikai Kumiko, said that the suitable meaning for *mokusatsu* was "give it the silent treatment"; this means that the Japanese would not take any action and just waited for the Soviet Union's action. The translator's use of the word 'ignoring' was taken as 'rejecting' and thus, ten days afterwards the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. This example provides a clear example of translation as a form of communication. It is also clear that diction or choice of words should be carefully chosen because it can break down communication.

Meaning over Form

The quotation from Macmillan online dictionary can illustrate the importance of prioritizing meaning over form in the translation from English into Indonesian. From the thirteen meanings of the word 'cut', the meaning and examples below can create problems in translation.

TRANSITIVE to **injure** a part of your body with something **sharp that cuts the skin**

Examples:

1. Be careful not to cut your finger.
2. He cut himself shaving.

(https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/cut_1#cut_1_19)

Both examples are active sentences in English, but have the meaning of 'not doing it on purpose.' This meaning (not on purpose) should be included in the Indonesian translation, although the form of the Indonesian sentence is changed into passive. The translation should be (1) *Hati-hati, jangan sampai jarimu teriris*; (2) *Ketika mencukur, ia terluka*. These are the right translations because the meaning of the English sentences and the meaning of the Indonesian sentences are the same; the form of the active English sentences become passive in Indonesian. When the forms are maintained—the Indonesian and the English sentences are active, the meaning will change; the following translations are wrong: (1) *Hati-hati, jangan sampai kamu mengiris jarimu*; (2) *Ketika mencukur, ia melukai wajahnya*. The change is that in English sentences, they are **not** done on purpose, while in Indonesian sentences, they are **done on purpose**. That is a great difference.

In other words, faithfulness is necessary in translation. What needs to be transferred from the source text into the target text is not only the meaning of the individual words, but also the features behind the words. Translators, also interpreters, must stay faithful in transferring meaning from the source text into the target text. In the example from Macmillan dictionary, the source text is English and the target text is Indonesian. In the example of the Hiroshima bombing, the source text is Japanese and the target text is English. Whatever the source text is and whatever the target text is, the principle of faithfulness still plays a very important role.

Faithfulness in translation can also be illustrated in the translation of the following joke.

Client: Can I try the dress in the window?
Salesperson: Of course not, you should try it in the fitting room.

This joke should be translated as follows in Indonesian.

Pembeli: Apa saya bisa mencoba baju di etalase itu?
Penjual: Tentu saja tidak boleh. Ibu harus mencobanya di kamar pas.

The joke lies in the ambiguity. Therefore, the ambiguity in this joke should be transferred into the target text. The ambiguity lies in the part of “Try the dress in the window”. It can mean “trying the dress which is in the window”, but it can also mean “the action of wearing the dress is carried out in the window” (and everybody in the street can see it). In this kind of joke, it is possible to transfer the ambiguity.

If the translator translates in this way *Apa saya bisa mencoba baju yang di etalase itu?*, then the joke disappears. The conversation is not logical anymore because it is clear that what the client means is the dress which is displayed in the window. If it is translated *Apa saya bisa mencoba baju di etalase itu?*, the client means **the dress which is displayed** in the window, but the shop assistant thinks **the action of wearing the dress is carried out in the window**. The unmatched perception creates humor.

Translators and interpreters should make an attempt to get across the content of the source text as far as possible in the target text. Failure to do this can result in the confusion of the audience. In other words, the result of the translation and interpretation should be user-friendly.

Being Faithful as Ethics

In my opinion, being faithful in conveying the ideas in the source text into the target text is a part of the ethics in translation and interpretation. The audience have the right to get what they deserve to get. The translator and interpreter have the duty to give as much as they can to the audience, in terms of the content of the translation and interpretation. They need to work hard to achieve this point. It is true that it is not easy to achieve it; at some point, it is even very difficult to achieve it or even impossible to achieve it 100%. However, translators and interpreters must try to achieve until nearly 100%. Translators and interpreters must not take it for granted that as long as the translation and interpretation have already been done, their duty is finished; it is now up to the audience whether the audience can understand their translation and interpretation or not. This kind

of attitude is very unethical. They must not pretend that they understand the content when actually they cannot. Although they assume that the audience do not understand this, in fact the audience can feel it. In communication, messages can be communicated without any verbal communication. The audience can feel whether the translation and interpretation are seriously done or not.

Another important aspect of faithfulness is user friendly. This means that the audience can understand the translation and interpretation in an easy way. To achieve this, it is not the words that should be changed, but the meaning of the source text that should be transferred to target text. For example, in a business letter, the sentence "Paid annual vacation time stands at 42 days" cannot be translated into *dibayarkan liburan tahunan selama 42 hari*, but it is easier for the audience to understand if they read *jatah cuti atau libur tahunan adalah 42 hari*. *Jatah* includes the meaning of "paid although the person is not coming to the office", while *dibayarkan liburan tahunan* implies the meaning of "the expenses spent in the vacation is going to be paid by the office." Translators and interpreters should consider whether their translated sentences or utterance can cause such audience's wrong perception.

Tips

In interpreting, especially in simultaneous interpreting, where the speaker and the interpreter speak at the same time, probably just a few second difference, interpreters do not have the time to ask the speaker what is not clear to the interpreters. Usually in conference interpreting, interpreters sit on the balcony at the back of the room and the speaker is in front of the audience. In terms of time and distance, it is not possible for them to communicate. In that case, if interpreters are not sure whether they understand what the speaker means, s/he can say to the audience phrases to indicate her/his uncertainty, for example: I think what s/he means is... or I am not sure if I translate it correctly or I can get his utterances clearly etc. In short, interpreters need to be honest.

In consecutive interpreting, where interpreters speak after the speaker talks, interpreters usually have some time to ask speakers when there is something they do not understand. Therefore, before the event of interpreting begins, one day or one week before, interpreters should contact the person in charge of the event to know where they stand or sit. They can request to be seated or stand next to the speakers.

In translation, translators are not that limited in time as interpreters. It is true that they have time constrain from the clients or publishers. It is usually in terms of weeks or months or days. The point is that they have time to consult dictionaries or people or encyclopedias. Being translators indeed means working hard with a great number of thick books. Research comes before the action of translating.

CONCLUSION

Translators and interpreters are communicators. Errors in translation and interpretation can bring disaster or confusion in communication. Therefore, it is important for translators and interpreters to do the job seriously. Indeed, their job is not easy, but by working hard and seriously, best result can be achieved.

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