Pragmatic Interpretation in Translated Texts

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Abstract : A pragmatic approach to translation studies the rules and principles governing the use of language over and above the rules of syntax or morphology, and what makes some uses of language more appropriate than others in [communicative] situations. It attempts to explain translation as a procedure and product from the point of view of how, why and what is done by the source text author (ST) and what is to be done in the target text (TT) rendition. The latter will be subject to evaluation not as generated by the linguistics system but as conveyed and manipulated by participants in a communicative situation according to the referential and pragmatic standards employed. The failure of a purely lexical or structural translation stems from ignoring the relation between words as signs and the effect they have on their users. A more refined approach would also consider those processes that are sometimes labeled extra-linguistic or intuitive and which translators strive to reproduce unscathed in the translation process. We need to grasp the kind of actions an ST author performs on his readers by combining linguistic and non-linguistic elements against a backdrop of beliefs and cultural values. In other words, aside from considering the cohesive ties at the textual level, one needs to understand how the whole ST discourse hangs together logically in order to reproduce a coherent TT. The latter can only be achieved by an analysis of the pragmatic elements of presuppositions, implicatures and acts performed in the ST. Establishing cohesive ties within a text may require seeking reference outside the immediate text. The illocutionary functions manifested in one language/culture are relatively autonomous cultural/linguistic categories, but are imaginable by members of other cultures and, to some extent , are translatable though not, of course, without translation loss. Globalization and the spread of literacy worldwide may have created a universal empathy to comprehend the performative aspect of utterances when explained by approximate glosses or by paraphrase. Yet, it is often the multilayered and the culture-specific nature of illocutionary functions that de-universalize their possible interpretations. This paper addresses the pragmatic interpretation of culturally specific texts with examples adduced from a number of distinct settings to illustrate the influence of the pragmatic factors at stake.
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