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LOCALES AND INTERLANGUAGE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: Traditional approaches fail to grasp the essential drivers and turns of interlingual communication in a wide context of current technological, marketing and economic processes. New scenarios of cross- and interlanguage information distribution, prevalence of functionality, timeliness, relevance, predictability, relevance and marketing function of selling texts over standards of quality, do not comply with any types of equivalence and adequacy. The concept of 'locale' is used in a variety of research, including Translation and Localization Studies, Marketing, Sociology, Political Science, etc., and allows to identify new variables, qualities and functions of interlanguage communication, embedded into technologically and economically driven processes of content and products distribution. Such parameters of locales as purchasing power, size, stronger or weaker communicative potential of languages, etc., account for asymmetries in interlingual communication and provide for the conceptualization of new patterns of content production and consumption across languages.

Key words: locale, translation, interlanguage communication, content distribution

1. Introduction

Since 1990s the digitalization of communication and emergence of translation and localization industry have reshaped the scenarios of cross- and interlanguage communication and given rise to alternative forms of distribution of information across language borders. Human translation has long been a privileged means of communication between nations and cultures, however it has been gradually marginalized within the diversified field of language services. Localization as adaptation of digital products had been the first palpable challenge to conceptualization of translation as a dominant practice in multilingual communication. The concept of translation as a measurable relation between the source and the target texts and an individual creative act, as well as messianic conceptualizations of translation as a means of "the construction of a borderless world" (Cronin 2013:5), tend to become obsolescent in the contexts of cross-market multilingual copywriting, MT-mediated communication (including instant machine translation, and post-editing practices), international news distribution, multilingual natural language generation as "automatic production of texts in various languages within a single system" (Bateman et al. 1999:607), cross-lingual summarization, etc. The ideal of interlanguage communication as a relatively independent and self-sufficient process, that shapes cross-cultural understanding, is sidelined within technological, marketing and economic contexts.

The discourses of Translation Studies coined and borrowed a bundle of terms (transcreation, transadaptation, rewriting, versioning, transrepresentation, etc.) in an attempt to conceptualize the trends of diversification in the language industry (Adams 2013), however the traditional approaches fail to grasp the essential drivers and turns of actual processes of interlingual communication. Currently a new interdisciplinary research paradigm is emerging based on the shift from language- and culture-centred studies to a wider economic, marketing and technological context of interlingual communication. In fact, translation today may be defined as a function of global processes, providing for the movement of products, services, capital and ideologies across locales. The interdisciplinary concept of 'locale' has been used in a variety of research, including Translation and Localization Studies, Marketing, Sociology, Political Science, etc., and in particular in a seminal work by Pym (Pym 2004b). However, the potential of this term has been generally under-evaluated and deserves attention.

2. The Origin and Extension of the Term 'Locale'

Since 1980s the term 'locale' has been used in software engineering and localization industry to denote "a collection of standard settings, rules and data specific to a language and geographical region" (Esselink 2000:471). Such settings include language code, data formats (date, time, numbers, units of measurements), line and word breaking, etc. The term retains this narrow meaning in IT engineering and localization industry in contexts related to localization proper. The term refers to "a set of parameters that define the user's language, region and any special variant preferences that the user wants to see in their user interface" (Meiert 2020:110), "the combination of a sociocultural region and language in industrial settings" (Jiménez-Crespo 2013:12), "cultural and linguistic setting applicable to the interpretation of a character string" (Wright 2015:548).

Since 2000s the practice of localization expanded to other of digital products, such as websites and games. Preparing a website or a game for a new locale involves the modification of a broader set of locale-sensitive features, including color schemes, images, gender aspects, cultural conventions, ideological issues, storylines in games (Bernal-Merino 2015:174), etc. The dialogues and marketing texts in such projects are modified or completely rewritten to meet the needs of the target audience. At this point localization industry adopted the practices and terminology of cross-cultural marketing and copywriting and, in particular, the term 'transcreation' (Spinzi 2018) defined as a "top-level process" that involves "rewriting in another language, changing the message itself if needed, to adapt to cultural differences" (Haberstroh 2015). Transcreation

> "could be seen more as copywriting than as translation. It's a service performed primarily by in-market writers, not linguists. That's why transcreation is often synonymized with 'cross-market copywriting' and 'international copy adaptation'" (Fairman 2019).

Within localization projects 'translation proper' is opposed to transcreation as a non-creative process of encoding "the same information from one language to another" (Haberstroh 2015), or "taking written words from a source language and conveying them in a target language" (Fairman 2019). This "naïve substitutionalism" (Cronin 2006:30) prevailed in industry-based conceptualizations of translation until the 2010s and has been much debated in Translation Studies.

The scope of the term localization expanded within this broad approach and is currently used to refer to dubbing, subtitling, comics, text genres, news distribution, and customization of any products that involves modification and adaptation of content. In consequence the scope of the term 'locale' was also expanded to grasp the sets of parameters that may not be reduced to language and regional requirements sufficient in earlier projects of software localization. Locales refer "to a collection of people who share a language, writing system and any other properties which may require a separate version of a product" (Sandrini 2005), "social places where sets of cultural, linguistic and economic parameters coincide for the purposes of attaining specific mutual benefits" (Pym 2004a:16-17), "the combination of a sociocultural region and language in industrial settings" (Jiménez-Crespo 2013:12). Broadly defined, locale is a "reception situation" (Pym 2004b:1) including economic, political, cultural, legal, ethical, linguistic, marketing, etc. features, that shape the process and results of communication. Similar conceptualization of the term 'locale' is relevant to spheres beyond language industry (economics, political studies, sociology), whenever it does not suffice to refer to geographical or economic 'region,' 'culture' or 'language community.' A. Giddens, for example, prefers the term 'locale' to that of 'place'

"because it is more than merely a 'positional' term. The locales of collectivities are integrally involved with the structural constitution of social systems, since common awareness of properties of the setting of interaction is a vital element in the sustaining of meaningful communication between actors" (Giddens 1981:39).

In the most general sense,

"a 'locale' is a virtual rather than a physical location, where a group of people share certain cultural and linguistic conventions in a consistent way so that the localization industry is able to identify the locale and distinguish it from other, maybe neighbouring, locales" (Budin 2006:290).

3. Purchasing Power and Asymmetry

Similar generic definitions of the term 'locale' are rare in research and industry discourse. In practice, the set of parameters delimiting locales, depend on a particular product to be localized or a text to be modified for a particular market and 'reception situation.' The key parameters are typically reduced to language and culture/country, as in locale IDs in IT engineering (en_US, en_UK, etc.) 'Culture' in such contexts is taken broadly, as a collection of localizable element plus cultural conventions and specific marketing, social, etc. features. Whenever a more detailed description of a

particular reception situation is necessary, the concept of locale may be represented through a number of hyponymic terms, such as 'language locale,' 'legal local,' 'professional local,' 'indigenous locale,' 'marketing locale,' etc. In each particular case variables delimiting a target locale overlap but are not identical in terms of regional, linguistic, legal, ethical, etc. aspects. The concept of locale "thus becomes fundamentally empirical: locales do not exist until they show themselves by resisting some process of distribution" (Pym 2004b:22).

Language and cultural conventions are not of critical priority as factors motivating the distribution of information, including translation proper. The decisions to target particular locales are initially "based on the purchasing power of the target market, i.e. on the gross domestic product (GDP) in a particular country, rather than on the number of speakers of a language" (Schäler 2009:161), or "on factors such as market size and the potential revenue the localized product will generate" (McDonough Dolmaya 2018:347). Another key issue delimiting locales is that

> "localized products must comply with local laws, and so nation-states and the official languages continue to be the dominant way for localizers to categorize regional markets even though this means that cultural diversity within nation-stated must be largely ignored" (McDonough Dolmaya 2018:347).

The priority of these factors in decision making results in essential asymmetry in product/information distribution and accessibility across cultures and languages. In economic context languages may be characterized as having stronger or weaker communicative potential and in fact become a commodity. The amount of information moving across languages is predicted by purchasing power, the value and amount of information produced within locales: "The bigger the locale, the greater the percentage of movements from that locale. The smaller the locale, the greater the percentage of movements into that locale" (Pym 2004b:45).

Asymmetry of movements between locales is manifested both in terms of the volume of content moving into and from a locale and in the 'depth' of product localization or the levels of language facilitation represented, for example, by enabled, localized and adapted products (O'Hagan and Ashworth 2002:74), or full, partial or deep localization. Japanese games, for example, are fully localized for the North American market, including voiceover, while European versions are typically subtitled (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013:235). The versions produced for these 'pivot locales' may be used for subsequent localization and "mask the Japanese origin whether or not this is the publisher's intention" (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013:235).

4. The Cases of Publishing Market and News Distribution

The scope of the article does not allow for a comprehensive overview of the variety of aspects involved into interaction of locales and will be restricted to two cases, related to translation proper. The first case is translation publishing market in Russia, including titles translated from and into the Russian language.

According to the Russian Book Chamber, in 2017 the share of translated titles in the Russian publishing market is 12,9% (15,121 titles); 61,0% in this share are translations from English, 8,4% and 5,5% are translations from French and German respectively. In France and Germany, the share of titles translated from Russian is less than 1% and is still in decline (Wischenbart et al 2019). The linguistic diversity in publishing market in Russia represent a similar asymmetry. There are about 100 written languages in Russia, in 60 languages books and media are published. In 2017, 3393 titles were published in languages other than Russian, including 1108 titles in English and 1048 titles in minority languages of the Russian Federation (299, 328 and 146 titles in Tatar, Bashkir and Yakut languages respectively). Only 171 books were translated from Russia's minority languages into Russian.

The statistics cited above represents an asymmetry that expands to the general processes of content and products distribution, including software, websites, marketing texts, etc. and may be effectively conceptualized in terms of cross-locale interaction. In marketing terms, Russian is the 'pivot language' constituting a multilingual economic locale, that does not require minor acts of localization or translation for distributing information and products. Global brands, for example, use primarily Russian language for marketing in Russia as well as in many post-soviet states.

A closer look at the economics of the Russian translation publishing market reveals the effects that it has produced on the quality of translations. The choice of titles for translation is essentially based on mass marketing rates, which is often termed as 'degrading selection.' Publishing houses now tend to monopolize the right to translation of hit titles, or otherwise attempt to be the first to publish a bestseller. As a result, translators now work under constant time pressure and for lower rates. Publishing cycles are shorter and often reduced to automatic spellcheck. The sociology of translators and consumers has also changed, including their educational and cultural background, work experience and general linguistic competence. In fact, the consumer market is now ready for poor quality, which has become a 'standard.' The competing publishing houses prefer sales over quality, cheaper and faster translators over qualified staff. Translation Studies seem to overlook these parameters of the Russian locale and focus on the linguistic quality of mass fiction translations that have been regularly scorned in academia for mistakes, style and choice of the titles. This criticism makes perfect sense in line with traditional linguistic analysis of translations in terms of equivalence, adequacy, pragmatics, etc., stating general incompetence of translators. However, such research does not provide any informative explanation as to why and how translation quality reduced dramatically over time. Such an explanation may be given if we attempt to have a look at the current Russian translation and consumer market as a receiving locale. Every single translation under analysis should be viewed in the context of a particular production-consumption cycle, where sales become a measure of success, taking over abstract or benchmark quality.

The movement of content across locales has another key parameter that may be described in marketing term of push and pull strategies. Push strategy is represented in planned and predictable cross-locale transfer of products and content, while pull strategy relies on consumer demand, when "users play a big role in deciding which language(s), content types and what quality levels should be given priority" (Meer

2019:288). News translation is an example of a complex pull-push-pull process. Large news aggregators collect locale news (pull) and publish them in 'pivot languages' (push), while local news media selectively transfer news from pivot into local languages (pull). Local-to-local news translation is another example of pull process. In Translation Studies, news translation has been studied with a focus to various adaptation and modification produced in the target texts related to the social and political contexts. The nomenclatures of modifications are numerous (Schäffner 2012). Schäffner insists that all strategies of news adaptation (transediting) may be analyses in terms of extended methodology of Translation Studies, while other researchers state that translation

> "is one element in a complex set of processes whereby information is transposed from one language into another and then edited, rewritten, shaped and repackaged in a new context, to such a degree that any clear distinction between source and target ceases to be meaningful" (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009:11).

No matter what terminology is used in research (news adaptation, transediting, transcreation, rewriting, etc.), the analysis is primarily focused on interlingual shifts in texts and their motivation in cultural, social, political, economic, etc. contexts, which constitute the parameters of locales. This type of methodology is essentially inductive and overlooks the underlying process of news distribution. Thinking in terms of locales proper would change the methodology of analysis and allow to focus on media distribution across locales that "has often been lost amid scholarly emphasis on production and consumption" (Lewis and Westlund 2015:31). Moreover, thinking in terms of locales will include into the scope of analysis news distribution across non-structured consumer communities, groups of digital public and social media. The overall landscape of news distribution should include intralingual news adaptation (that may be defined in terms of intralingual translation or rewording) for different consumer communities, the effects algorithmic news distribution ('digital paperboys' rewriting news) (Diakopoulos 2019), the consumption of non-translated content and automated online news translation. These aspects of news distribution fall behind the translation analysis. Distribution of information across language borders (translation) may be effectively conceptualized only with all mentioned processes in mind.

5. Conclusion

Current Translation Studies provide accounts of particular aspects of global communication processes, technological and economic contexts of language industry and their impact on the volume and motivation of content distribution. The agenda of studies in cross-cultural and digital marketing, economy of language, cross-linguistic aspects of human-computer interaction is related to various aspects of interlingual communication. Translation and localization, however, are hardly ever their primary subject matter.

Conceptualization of interlingual communication and translation proper in terms of interaction across locales, provides for consolidation of emerging interdisciplinary

framework. The concept of 'locale' is interdisciplinary in nature and allows identify new qualities and functions of language and communication that are embedded into technologically and economically driven processes of content and products distribution. Such parameters of locales as purchasing power, size, stronger or weaker communicative potential of languages, etc. allow to account for asymmetries in interlingual communication in the hierarchy of locales, make sense of particular cases of content modification and include into the scope of research cross-language copywriting, algorithm-mediated content distribution and new patterns of content consumption across languages.

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