TRANSLATION IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Pop Mirabela
Universitatea din Oradea, Str. Universitatii nr.1-3, Oradea, 410087, 0259-408799, mipop@uoradea.ro

The purpose of this article is to explore the potential of translation as a survival strategy that enables foreign languages teachers to continue practicing their discipline, and to consider translation as a powerful means for asking new questions about the teacher’s research agenda and, about the disciplinary character of business communication. The paper discusses various types of translation activities based upon the teachers’ roles in these activities: how, as instructors of business communication, they engage in a metaphoric kind of translation by examining the knowledge and practices of their colleagues from other disciplines when they are members of foreign departments, and by making their tradition accessible to students, who, in turn, translate their discursive activities from the academy to the workplace; how as researchers in business communication, the teachers’ work has enormous resemblances with the histories, theories, and practices of literary translation.

Key words: translation, business communication, authority, source language.

1. Introduction

In her introduction to The Art of Translation, Rosanna Warren warns us that “A person or culture guarding its privacy to an extreme extent becomes ‘idiotic,’ even autistic, and such resistance to the foreign, such incapacity to translate, spells its doom.”[ Warren, R. (1992). Introduction. In R. Warren (Ed.), “The art of translation: Voices from the field”, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1992, p.3]

The purpose of this article is to explore the potential of translation as a survival strategy that enables foreign languages teachers to continue practicing their discipline, and to consider translation as a powerful means for asking new questions about the teacher’s research agenda and about the disciplinary character of business communication. As used here, the term “translation” does not refer to a simplistic idea of “information-transfer” from one natural language to another, with an emphasis on word-for-word fidelity to the original text, which is assumed to be superior to the translation. [Cf. Forman, J., “More Than Survival: The Discipline of Business Communication and the Uses of Translation”, The Journal of Business Communication. Volume: 35. Issue: 1, 1998. p.50]

Instead, the focus is first on metaphoric notions of translation considered as a wide-ranging enterprise involving movement between instruction and research in business communication, between discourses, or between disciplines, and then on translation studies, or complex ideas of translation drawn from histories, theories, and practices of literary translation. Translation studies cast light on the work of those business communication researchers who engage in translation metaphorically whenever they adapt concepts, methodologies, and theories from other disciplines for their research.

The paper discusses various types of translation activities based upon the teachers’ roles in these activities: how, as instructors of business communication, they engage in a metaphoric kind of translation by examining the knowledge and practices of their colleagues from other disciplines when they are members of foreign departments (such as business schools or traditional English departments), and by making their tradition accessible to students, who, in turn, translate their discursive activities from the academy to the workplace; how as researchers in business communication, the teachers’ work has enormous resemblances with the histories, theories, and practices of literary translation.

The introduction of translation to the economic field is to encourage further discussion of its multiple uses in teaching and research. More specifically, business communication instructors should be encouraged to bring their translation activities more deeply and consciously into their work, and the translator-researchers to examine their research activities as acts of translation because such understanding can itself create knowledge in the field.

2. Translation in Business Communication

Translation is a survival strategy in the roles as instructors. By approach and attitude toward foreign texts, translators are experts in working with strangers and with texts from other cultures. In discussing their craft, they acknowledge the importance of being receptive to the possibilities of source languages, the languages they are translating from. [Cf. Biguenet, J., Schulte, R. (Eds.), “The craft of translation”, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989]

In this regard, the German critic and literary historian August Wilhelm Schlegel argued that the practice of translating should allow critics to develop a “flexibility which enables us, by renouncing personal predilection and blind habit, to transfer ourselves into the peculiarities of other nations and ages, to feel them . . . from their own center.”[ Wellek, R., “A history of modern criticism: 1750-1950: The Romantic age”. (Vol. 2), Yale University Press, New Haven, 1955, p.38]

Translators listen, absorb, and learn the source language in the fullest sense and in their quest for knowledge of source languages, they pursue whatever a particular text requires - be it grammar, history, philosophy - and,
when they are dealing with living source languages, information provided by informants. Such implication in the source language is quite difficult, especially for those who work in business communication programs, in business schools the translator’s attitude being very useful because it requires learning the source languages of the business school (for instance, marketing, accounting, economics).

Business students who, in writing reports, are engaged in doing objective analysis of business problems using the jargon and models of specific academic disciplines learn how to translate their theoretical knowledge into the human action of the workplace in which they learn. They want their analyses understood and their recommendations implemented; they are not attached observers as they were in the classroom. Translation moves students from classroom to workplace, from objective analysis to real engagement, from professional education to workplace practice. In learning to move from academic to workplace discourse, the students become translators.

3. The Authority of the Translator

With few students or instructors reading foreign texts in the original language, translation tends to be an invisible art, and to the naive reader, translations appear to be indistinguishable from the original. Yet, translators are privileged readers and writers with authority. Privilege and authority derive first from their decisions about what to translate. Donald Frame states that he first estimates how much of a source text can be brought across in translation and then decides whether to undertake the translation on the basis of what he calls its “potential yield”. [Frame, D., Pleasures and problems of translation. In J. Biguenet, R. Schulte (Eds.), “The craft of translation”, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989, p.71]

For those texts chosen for translation, the translator’s privilege and authority derive from the choices translators make, that is, the possibilities of meaning that they exclude and those they bring to life in the translation as its key characteristics. These characteristics necessarily constrain one’s reading experience. Obviously, in the hands of the naive or authoritarian translator, such privilege can have serious consequences for the fate of the translated text and the language into which it is translated. Often, the naive translator engages in a mechanical and superficial process, seeking word-for-word equivalents between languages. This procedure is exacerbated when the translator has little competence in the source language; in that case, he uses a “stop-and-start” method, pausing at the words he does not understand [Cf. Forman, J., & Katsky, P., “The group report: Problems in small group or writing processes?” The Journal of Business Communication, 23(4), 1986. pp.23-35] and often failing to identify false cognates, that is, terms in the original that on the surface appear to have equivalents in the translation but do not (for instance, actually in English, which means in Romanian de fapt, not actual). The final version of the translation is, then, a record of the translator’s faulty readings.

In business communication, translators are researchers who bring concepts, methodologies, and theories from other disciplines into major research forums – “foreign texts”. Just as with literary translators, researchers in business communication who go to other languages outside the discipline are privileged knowledge makers with authority. What they choose to translate for their research contributes to the direction of knowledge in the discipline and defines and elaborates its tensions.

4. The Goals of Translation

Along with the choice of a text and how it is to be rendered in translation, translators make judgments about the purpose of the translation. Purpose tends to fall into one of two broad categories although there may be substantial overlap or lack of clarity about purpose in the translator’s mind. A translation may be source-text focused, placing primary value on the original, and the text in the source language. That is, the translator attempts to bring across what he considers to be essential in the original - of course, in some approximate form and at the cost of giving up some other characteristics of the original. Alternatively, a translation may be focused outside the original on the target language, on either the language the text is to be translated into, or, more specifically, on the development of the translator’s own linguistic range and professionalism. That is, the translator uses the activity of translation to enrich the target language and, in the case of translators who are also writers of fiction, poetry, or drama, to enhance the translator’s own creative work.

The translator who focuses on the source text is necessarily engaged in comparative understanding of source and target languages and tries to evoke in the reader of the translation a reading experience like that of someone capable of reading the original. Also, for highly valued and frequently translated texts, the translator considers the relative merits of multiple versions of the original, and the reputations of the source text and the translations. English translators’ reflections on their own practices suggest that the unique capabilities and limitations of English grammar and poetics may be partially defined by being placed against another language which is itself illuminated by comparative study. As he works, rereading source text and translation-in-progress, the translator points out difficulties, some of which define irreconcilable differences between language systems while illuminating them comparatively. Equivalent lexical items or syntactic structures may be unavailable in the target language. Local expression and idiom may be impossible to translate.

Translators who focus on the source text want as much as possible to bring across into the target language the experience of someone capable of reading the original. But as translation theorist Talal Asad (1995) tells, “insofar as discourse is enmeshed in particular ways of life, its translation from one language to another is never completely successful”. [Asad, T., “A comment on translation, critique, and subversion”. In A. Dingwaney, C. Maier (Eds.),
Literary translators who attempt to bring across as much of the context as they can sometimes achieve relative success in their efforts by translating several pieces of a writer rather than a single example, in recognition of what translation theorist Ramanujan calls the “systematicity” of a writer’s work, “the way figures, genres, personae, etc., intermesh, in a master-code”. [Ramanujan, A. K., “On translating a Tamil poem”. In R. Warren (Ed.), “The art of translation: Voices from the field”. Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1992, p.61] Selection is involved here. As Ramanujan notes, “Even if one chooses not to translate all the poems, one chooses poems that cluster together, that illuminate one another, so that allusions, contrasts, and collective designs are suggested.”[ Ramanujan, A. K., “On translating a Tamil poem”. In R. Warren (Ed.), “The art of translation: Voices from the field”. Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1992, p.61]

In contrast to the source-text focused translator, another group of translators are primarily interested in using the source text to develop either the target language or, more specifically, their own creative writing in the target language. As one scholar of translation has explained, “[t]he original is brought over in order to reveal the latent stylistic possibilities in one’s own language that are different from the original”. [Friedrich, H., “On the art of translation”. In R. Schulte, J. Biguenet (Eds.), “Theories of translation: An anthology of essays from Dryden to Derrida”. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, p.13] This interest in enhancing the target language appeared in classical times when translation served as an exercise to train young rhetoricians in style and invention in their native tongue, and has been used ever since by poets and writers of fiction to discover themes and enhance their stylistic versatility.

From this point of view, translation may have enormous generative potential, which is its primary appeal to translator/researchers in business communication. They have aggressively incorporated and modified foreign sources, subordinating them to research concerns in the discipline; indeed, this translation activity has characterized much of the development of the discipline.

5. Conclusion
Translation may, provide multiple ways for translator/researchers to extend the research agenda of business communication and to contribute to that of other disciplines. As instructors of business communication, translation has been a survival strategy, enabling teachers to gain entry into “foreign” departments and to legitimate their teaching. As instructors who translate, they attend to language closely and comparatively. It may now be the right moment to introduce the activities of translation – as history, practice, and theory – to colleagues in other disciplines and to see how it may take hold in their teaching and in the broader practices of educational institutions.

Bibliography: