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Intercultural mediation, intercultural communication and translation

The role of translator as intercultural mediator has received greater attention in translation studies since the 'cultural turn' of the 1990s. This paper explores the question of intercultural mediation as an activity in intercultural communication and the ways that this applies to translation. It takes as its starting point the idea that mediation is fundamentally an interpretive act through which meanings that have been created in one language are communicated in another. The paper seeks to understand how the practices of intercultural mediation are realised in translation and argues that mediation is a process that involves aspects that are internal to the translator (mediation for the self) and aspects that are oriented to the reader of the target text (mediation for others) that are in turn linked through selective processes of determining what resources are needed to enable a target text reader to understand a source text meaning.

Keywords: translation, intercultural mediation, interpretation, mediation for the self, mediation for others

Introduction

Translation studies since the 1980s have taken a 'cultural turn' (Lefevere & Bassnett, 1990) in which translation is no longer seen as a primarily linguistic process, but one that recognises that translation is a culturally contexted activity influenced by factors that lie outside what is normally understood by language. As a result of this cultural turn in translation studies, studies of translation have brought into greater focus the idea that translation is a form of intercultural communication (e.g. Katan, 2009; Schäffner, 2003). Tt is intuitively obvious that a translator as an intercultural communicator stands between cultures in some way and that it is through this positioning between cultures that the translator works. This positioning has given rise to the idea that the translator mediates languages and cultures between the source text and the target text (e.g. Katan, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2009; Pöchhacker, 2008; Steiner, 1975; Tymoczko, 2007). Much of the literature on translators as mediators, however, takes the idea of the translator as mediator

as a given and then analyses the knowledge translators need to mediate or the consequences of their mediation. There is less attention given to what it means for a translator to be a mediator and what processes are involved in the mediational work of translators.[1] In this paper, I wish to consider further what the idea of a translator as an intercultural mediator involves and how this is consequential for understanding translation as a process.

Intercultural mediation

Before examining the nature of intercultural mediation[2] as a component of the communicative work of translators, it is important to consider what is meant by the idea of mediation in this context. To do this involves stepping outside the field of translation studies to examine how the idea of intercultural mediation is understood in the wider field. The term is commonly used in both the field of intercultural communication and in foreign language education in ways that indicate something of its importance for translation. In both these literatures there are two ways of understanding the nature of intercultural mediation. The first is as a problem solving activity that deals with communication breakdown caused by cultural difference. For example, one early formulation constructed the mediation component of intercultural communication as the ability to handle cross-cultural problems which result from cultural differences (Meyer, 1991, p. 137). Intercultural mediation has, therefore, tend to reify problems as the 'stuff' of intercultural communication and normalise miscommunication as the unmediated state of interaction between cultures (Fitzgerald, 2002). Such views of mediation are, I would argue, of limited use for understanding the work of translators as they represent cultural differences as static and see mediation as the formulation of static, explanatory elements that can resolve communication problems (Piller, 2011).

A more productive way to think about intercultural mediation is to see it as a relational and interpretative activity. That is intercultural mediation is "an active engagement in diversity as a meaning making activity" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 54) that involves interpreting the meaning of diverse others for oneself and for others. This means that intercultural mediation is not solely the resolution of communication problems but also the development of shared understandings between participants in communication. Irishkanova et al. (2004) therefore argue that intercultural mediators are involved in processes of understanding, explaining, commenting, interpreting and negotiating phenomena. Intercultural mediators both analyse the meanings of others constructed within cultural framings and provide those who do not share a cultural framing with the means to understand diverse others (Gohard-Radenkovic, Lussier, Penz, & Zarate, 2004). In the field of translation studies, a similar view of mediation has been put forward by Katan (2004), who argues that translation as mediation involves representing both that which is explicitly expressed and that which is implicitly expressed – that is, the meaning of a text lies not only in the language itself but also in what the language means more broadly to a reader.

The mediational role of the translator, therefore, goes beyond the expression of meaning through language to encapsulate the need to communicate the meanings that are present in text but which are expressed implicitly, through context. In this sense too, the mediator is an interpreter of meaning and a communicator of interpreted meaning. The intercultural mediator is thus positioned between cultures as an interpreter of meanings and is involved in a complex hermeneutic process (Liddicoat, 2014). The intercultural mediator can therefore be understood as a practitioner in diversity in which acts of interpretation and meaning-making are fundamental to

communication – that is, mediation involves both analysis and performance (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Translation as mediation

In considering translation as intercultural mediation, it is important to remember that translation has both similarities to and differences from other forms of intercultural communication (Schäffner, 2003) and that these have an impact on the mediational process itself. The most significant features of translation as a site for intercultural mediation are schematised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Translation as intercultural mediation
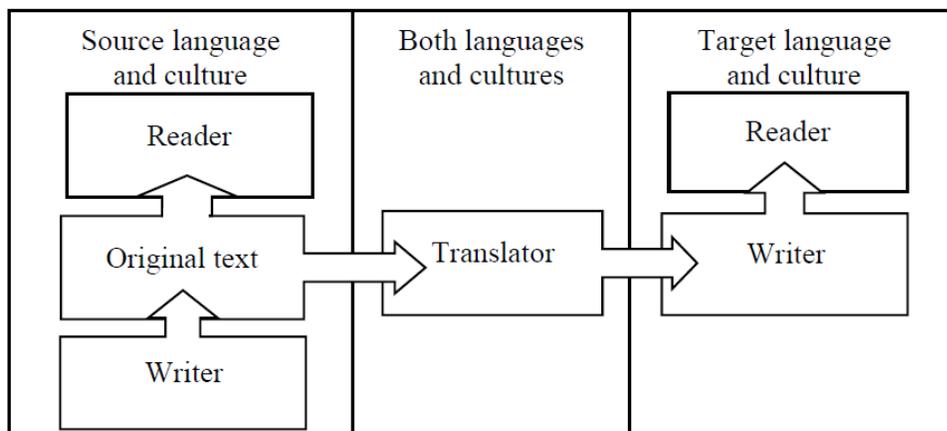
The left hand cell in Figure 1 refers to the act of composition of the source text. In this case the text is written in a particular language, within its particular cultural context for an imagined audience. This imagined audience either shares the language and culture of the writer or the writer mediates a culture for an imagined audience. This would be the case for example in certain types of post-colonial, immigrant or transcultural fiction. In composing the text, the writer shapes the text for the expectations and understandings of the imagined audience. That is, the writer is typically not participating in, or intending to participate in, intercultural communication, or in cases where intercultural communication is intended by the author it is

oriented to one particular target culture grouping – that of the source language reader. From the reader's perspective, represented by the right hand cell, the act of reading is also a largely culture internal process. The reader reads the text in his/her own language and cultural context and typically does not have access to the language and culture of the writer: including knowledge and expectations that the writer assumes may be shared. In fact, the reader may not be conscious during reading that the text is a translation, given the frequent invisibility of the translator (Venuti, 2006), or may not recognise the consequentiality of the fact the text is a translation. For the reader then the act of reading is not principally a form of intercultural communication.

The translator as mediator stands between the reader and writer and rewrites the text for an audience that is not the audience imagined by the writer and does not share the language, knowledge, assumptions, etc. that the writer has assumed of the imagined audience for the text. That is, the translator is the sole true intercultural communicator in this communication process and mediates a text that was not designed for this intercultural communication for an audience that does not necessarily see it as intercultural communication. This is the underlying complexity of the mediational act of the translator as s/he turns something that may not in itself be designed or received as an intercultural communication into an act of intercultural communication. This is fundamentally different from the way most forms of intercultural mediation are conceived: events in which all participants are knowingly involved in intercultural communication. The translator is a mediator who is typically isolated both from the creator of the message and its receiver. S/he may perform the work of rewriting without contact with either the writer or the reader and without the possibility of effecting negotiation through interactions between the two. The act of translation is a form of intercultural mediation that operates on texts rather than with communicators themselves and, in working on a text, translation relocates it within another

literary tradition with its own aesthetic and other values and assumptions that influence the reception of the text (Brower, 1959). Ultimately the mediational work of the translator means that a text written in one language can come to be read as if it had been created in the target language and culture.[3]

In rewriting the text for an audience not imagined by the original writer, the translator is involved in a number of mediational activities. At the most easily apparent level s/he mediates the language of the writer for the reader as a linguistic act. That is, s/he expresses meanings expressed in one language in another language. In addition s/he mediates the cultural context of the writer for the reader and this process is typically more complex than the mediation of language.

Processes of mediation

Above, I have argued that the translator as an intercultural mediator is isolated from both writer and reader and this has consequences for how the processes of mediation for a translator need to be understood. Mediation occurs for a translation at two levels – for the self and for others. Mediation for the self involves interpreting the source text by recognising the cultural constructedness of the meanings it creates. This form of mediation applies particularly, but not uniquely, when the culture of the texts' production is not the culture of the translator. However, if one recognises the highly variable nature of cultures, then it applies at some level in all acts of interpretation. It involves interpreting a culture that is not one's own to develop an understanding of the explicitly and implicitly expressed meanings on the text. This act of interpretation of culturally contexted language is a pre-requisite for interpreting another's culture for a new cultural group as the meaning of a text can be rewritten into another language only to the extent that it has been interpreted.

A simple example of mediation for the self can be seen in the ways students in a translation class I taught recently dealt with one particular sentence in a text they had been set to translate. The sentence was taken from Machi Tawara's (1992) short story 心に届く言葉 (*Kokoro in todoku kotoba*/Words that reach the heart). In this short story, Tawara describes a ワル (*waru*/bad boy) in her class and in her brief description of him says: 一年生の頃からのツッパリで、髪を赤く染めていた (From the time he was a first year student he was rebellious and he died his hair red). For the group of Australian students translating the text, this sentence invoked very different understandings of what the word 赤く (*aku* /red) meant in this sentence. Some students, with more developed knowledge of Japan, interpreted 'red' as a brownish colour (also known in Japanese as ちゃっぱつ, *chappatsu* lit. 'tea-coloured hair'), which in the past was associated with rebelliousness and non-conformity but now has become more of a fashion statement than an act of rebellion.[4] Other students understood it as a bright scarlet colour, which for them in their Australian context was the only hair colour that could be associated with rebellion. In fact, the students even remarked that *chappatsu* would not signify rebellion in Australia because for them it is a relatively natural hair colour, although it is not for Japanese people. The two groups of students adopted different interpretative frames in their reading of the text and produced different interpretations of this text based on the interpretative frame they adopted.

Mediation for self is a part of what Hatim and Mason (1990) refer to the position of the translator as a privileged reader. It is part of the critical and interpretive process that the translator as reader needs to engage in and represents a deployment of cultural awareness alongside language awareness as a central element in translating. Mediation for self is a form of participation in both cultures that presupposes the ability to interpret culturally contexted language and to reflect critically on such interpretations. This privileged reading involves

recognising and interpreting the culturally constructed nature of the meanings of the source text. It is the initial working through of the translator's 'bi-cultural vision' (Hatim & Mason, 1990, p. 223) that provides a reference point for the rewriting of the text into a new language and a new cultural framing by identifying and resolving the disparity between sign and value across cultures. Leppihalme (1997) refers to this as a metacultural capacity that enables the translator to comprehend the inclusion in the text of extralinguistic knowledge and understand the extent to which this knowledge will be available to a target text reader.

This rewriting is what I call mediation for others. Mediation for others involves interpreting the culturally contexted meanings of the source text for others who do not share the cultural starting points of the text and necessarily applies wherever the culture of the text's production is not the culture of its intended reception as a translation. It is a (re)representation of an interpretation for those who do not share the cultural framing of the interpretation and involves an act of interpretation that allows a person from outside a culture to understand something from within that culture.

The interpretative act of mediation for others is an intervention of the translator in the text in order to convey interpreted meanings to others – that is the act of translation needs to be conceptualised as an interpretative act rather than a purely linguistic transfer (Katan, 2009). This intervention consists in providing interpretative resources of some kind for a reader located within his/her own cultural context, with his/her own knowledge, values, assumptions, etc. That is, the translator in translating facilitates the comprehension of translated meanings through the rewriting of those meanings into a new textual form. This intervention can take a number of forms, but there are three strategies that can exemplify the range of possibilities. These are expansion/explanation, replacement and reframing.[5] All three of these strategies are distortions

of the text as Katan (2004) notes, but they are purposeful distortions that seek to deal with the consequences of the rewriting of a text into a new language in order for it to be read by members of another culture.

Expansion is an intervention in the text that provides the target text reader with additional information required for interpretation: that information which is implicitly expressed in the source culture frame for the source text reader is made explicit in the target culture and for the target text reader. Expansion, which often takes the form of explanation, has a significant mediational function in communicating information the significance of which is deeply contextualised. This is the case in the English translations of the following two French texts relating to a culturally symbolic event, the 1500th anniversary of the baptism of Clovis.

> *La France est née avec le baptême de Clovis en 496, qui représente le baptême de la France.* [France was born with the baptism of the **Frankish King** Clovis in 496, which represents the baptism of France.]

In this first example, the reference to Clovis, which has iconic resonance in a French cultural context but not in an English-speaking one, is briefly expanded to locate Clovis historically and socially. In this case, the translator's additions to the text (Frankish King) seek to fill in shared knowledge that is assumed by the writer of the source text but which the translator has assumed will not be shared by the reader of the target text.

The second text provides a more extensive intervention, but essentially performs the same function of explicitly articulating information that is assumed to be shared by the writer and readers of the source text.

> *La loi de 1905 met fin à la tradition qui datait de Clovis, d'une « France fille aînée de l'Église ».* [The 1905 law **on the separation of Church and State** put an end to

the tradition that dated from the **baptism of the Frankish King** Clovis **of France** as the "elder daughter of the **Catholic** Church".]

Here the text refers briefly to iconic elements relevant to understanding the cultural significance of the baptism of Clovis within French secular thought. Two of these elements involve dating references: 1905 and (the time of) Clovis. In a discussion focusing on religion, a reference to 'the 1905 law' for a French audience invokes a singular, identifiable law separating church and state, together with a discourse around what that separation means (i.e. the ideologies of *laïcité*). The addition identifies the focus of the law and in so doing makes at least part of the knowledge invoked implicitly by the reference available explicitly to the target text's readers. Similarly, in such a discussion a reference to dating from Clovis is also readily recoverable for a French audience in terms of the person involved (Frankish King... of France) and the foundational event (baptism). It also explicitly links the religious frames of the 1905 law and of the time of Clovis. A final addition is made to *Église* to specify it as the Catholic Church rather than another possible church, perhaps assuming that the term Church might be understood differently by an English-speaking audience (Anglican Church, Protestant Church?), from the interpretation of that word in French. The additions to the text in both examples provide the reader with resources that permit the text to be understood outside its original cultural frame. They involve responding to the world knowledge that is assumed by the language of the text (Liddicoat, 2009) but which the rewriting of the text into a new language means can no longer be assumed to be available.

Replacement is a strategy that uses a target culture frame in the place of a source culture frame to permit interpretation within the cultural frame of the target text. Such replacements can be seen as attempts to find replacements for culturally problematic references. Nabokov's (1923/2011) translation of *Alice in Wonderland* is particularly useful for exemplifying mediation in terms of replacement. In fact, replacement of culturally contexted items is the main strategy

used by Nabokov in his translation affecting even the name of Alice herself, who becomes *Аня* (Anya), substituting a familiar Russian name for a foreign one. Similar replacements occur with more culturally contexted references, such as William the Conqueror, whose name generates particular resonances for an English reader that would not be salient for a Russian speaker. In one case, William is invoked by Alice to explain why a mouse does not seem to understand her:

> «Может быть, она не понимает по-русски, — подумала Аня. — Вероятно, это французская мышь, оставшаяся при отступлении Наполеона» ["Perhaps it doesn't understand English," thought Alice; "I daresay it's a French mouse, come over with William the Conqueror."]

In this text, 'English' is replaced by 'Russian' as the language the mouse does not understand in order to fit the overall relocation of the story from England to Russia. The reference to a mouse that 'came over' with William is neither culturally salient for the target text audience nor internally consistent with other modifications made to the text and is replaced by a reference to a mouse that was left behind by Napoleon. Here an less accessible and incongruous historical event (the Norman invasion) is replaced by a more accessible one (the Napoleonic invasion) that equally explains the situation (why a mouse might speak French). Thus is the logic of Alice's thought maintained although the cultural framing of the logic is changed. A further mention of William as an example of a dry story is replaced by a reference to Vladimir Monomakh:

> — Вот самая сухая вещь, которую я знаю. Прошу внимания! Утверждение в Киеве Владимира Мономаха мимо его старших родичей повело к падению родового единства в среде киевских князей… [Here is the driest thing I know. Your attention, please! The adoption in Kiev of Vladimir Monomakh by his older relatives led to the failure of tribal unity among the Kievan princes…]

In this case, the translator's intervention in the text is not only the replacement of a name but of a

whole story, of which the quotation gives just the beginning. Carroll's text at this point reads:

> This is the driest thing I know. Silence all round, if you please! "William the Conqueror, whose cause was favoured by the pope, was soon submitted to by the English, who wanted leaders. And had of late been much accustomed to usurpation and conquest.

In this way, one story that is offered as an example of a tedious fact is replaced by another example: one drawn from British history, one from Russian history. Thus, the schoolroom flavour of the story is maintained through the switch of cultural contexts. Similar replacements are made in Nabokov's translation with references to food and familiar British food items such as 'tarts', 'hot buttered toast' and 'orange marmalade' become familiar Russian foods such as *пирожки* (pies), *гренки* ('French' toast) and *клубничный мармелад* (strawberry jam). In such uses of replacement, the intercultural mediation strategy locates interpretation of the text in the readers' cultural framing by maintaining connotations of familiarity for the Russian reader rather than introducing an element of exoticism by maintaining the English items.

A final strategy in mediation is reframing, that is, rewriting a text to fit cultural frames across languages so that cultural incompatibilities are reconciled. This strategy is described by Katan (1999, 2002) using an example taken from Italo Calvino's *L'avventura di una moglie*. In which the female character Stefania walks up to the bar in a café and orders a coffee: "*Un ristretto, doppio, caldissimo – disse al cameriere*". Katan argues that a literal translation such as "'A concentrated, double, very hot' she said to the waiter" is problematic as the language, when viewed through the cultural lens of an English speaker, appears brusque or rude. In so doing, it distorts the character's behaviour, which in an Italian context would be interpreted as an unremarkable service encounter. Rather than intervening in the text to adjust the politeness level by adding 'please' – an expansion strategy – Katan proposes a solution that involves reordering

the text to remove the interpretative problem that confronts the English reader: "She asked the barman for an espresso, 'thick, double and really hot'". This restructuring takes the form of a partial quotation of direct speech that allows the reader to infer a level of politeness that is normal for the context according to his/her cultural presuppositions about the relevant interactional norms.

These three strategies are presented here as illustrative examples of a range of possibilities for intercultural mediation rather than as an exhaustive summary of ways of including additional interpretive resources into a text to assist in meaning making.[6] Moreover, the concern here is not with whether these strategies can be considered as 'good' or 'bad' mediational strategies. The aim is rather to identify the common concern that such strategies reveal about the nature of intercultural mediation viewed as an intervention in the text that provides resources to facilitate the interpretation of a message created in one language for one cultural context when it is read in another language and in another cultural context.

Mediation as a selective process

This paper has argued that mediation is a fundamental part of the act of translation because translators need to attend to both the explicitly expressed and the implicitly expressed in communicating menacing across cultures. However, it is usually not possible for a translator to express all of the possible implicitly expressed messages and cultural references in a particular text[7] and mediational work is usually a selective process in which some meanings are mediated for the target reader and others are not. The decision to mediate is constrained both by the practicalities of publication – translated texts are not usually expected to exceed the length of the source text significantly[8] – and by the translator's perception of the needs of readers for mediation. This perception is a communicative one in which the translator operates on "beliefs

about the (communicative) needs inherent between texts and their readers" (Katan, 2009, p. 89).

The decision about whether to mediate or not is in itself an act of mediation in that it involves decision-making about the reader and the readers' needs in interpreting a text. It therefore involves the identification by the translator of an audience of typical readers for the target text and an understanding of the state of knowing of these imagined readers about the cultural framing that exists in the text. An audience with greater assumed knowledge about the cultural framings of the source text will require less mediation by the translator than an audience with less knowledge. In addition, the translator needs to consider the salience of the knowledge involved for the comprehension of the text. As Jull Costa (2007, p. 114) notes "Any cultural concept must be viewed in the context of the book or story as a whole and translated accordingly". This means that one element of the translators' mediation consists of a process of interpretation for him/herself of what the interpretative need is to understand a particular textual reference and then to consider whether the reader needs additional interpretative resources to understand that concept for the purposes of understanding the text. That is, the selectivity of mediation involves a bridging between mediation for the self and mediation for others. Similarly, this bridging is both an intercultural and a intracultural consideration (c.f. Tymoczko, 2006) in that it orients to both the rewriting of meanings from one culture to another and the positioning of those meanings with the culture(s) of the target text. This means that mediation ultimately has both self-reflexive and text-reflective dimensions.

Concluding comments

This paper has argued that translation as intercultural mediation is fundamentally an interpretative activity in which translators engage in creative acts of meaning-making between languages and cultures. This interpretation of language and culture involves both personal

interpretations (for the self) and communicated interpretations (for others) and a selective bridging between these interpretations. While mediation for others has usually been the focus of intercultural mediation in translation studies, the role of interpretation for self is also central as an element of the privileged reading that a translator does of a text. The translator as mediator is a participant in both cultures not by virtue of being "bicultural", as Taft (1981) claims, but rather as one who is engaged in performing and analysing interpretations both within and across cultural framings. That is, an intercultural mediator does not simply have knowledge of, or participate in, two cultures but rather has the interpretive capability to provide to members of one culture the interpretative resources needed to comprehend a text written for another.

Notes

1. Katan's work, especially Katan (1999, 2002), is a notable exception.

2. Also called 'cultural mediation' or 'cross-cultural mediation'.

3. I do not mean by this that the texts is 'domesticated' in Venuti's (1993) terms, but rather that the text becomes readable for a member of another culture because of the act of translation. This may involve domestication but it is equally true of a foreignised text, which too must be capable of being read and understood by its new audience.

4. The significance of *chappatsu* in educational contexts in Japan can be seen in comments such as that by Takahashi Shiro, secretary of a pressure group to demand reform of Japan's Basic Law of Education, listed *chappatsu* as an indication of the collapse of the Japanese schooling system: "As the result of bullying [*ijime*], truancy [*futoko*], the destruction of class discipline [*gakkyu hokkai*], the dyeing of hair [*chappatsu*], and youth prostitution [*enjo kosai*], the situation in schools has become serious [*taihen*] (cited in Saaler 2005, p. 86, translation by Saaler)

5. I am using 'mediation' as an activity of translators here in a sense that is broader than that given to it by Katan (2004). For Katan, mediation refers to intratextual modifications that respond to possible

problems of interpretation for target text readers and excludes elements such as notes, commentaries, etc. from mediation. Here I consider mediation to be any intervention, whether intratextual or extratextual, that are designed to assist interpretation by target text readers.

6. Katan (1999, 2002) calls only reframing strategies 'mediated' but this obscures the commonality that exists between the three approaches when they are considered as interpretative acts to make meaning for others.

7. Nabokov's four volume translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (Nabokov, 1964) is an example of a translation that attempts a maximal level of mediation with translator's introductions and commentaries accompanying the text, but even here some material is inevitably not mediated.

8. Nabokov's translation of *Eugene Onegin* is in this case a remarkable exception in which a relatively small source text is rewritten as a four volume work.

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