

The Role of Ideology and Tradition in Translation-Mediated Cross-Cultural Change Management in Globalized Downstream Internet and Satellite Media-Driven Knowledge Transfer

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of ideology and tradition in translation-mediated change management. It investigates the phenomenon of translation-mediated cross-cultural change management and the impact of globalized knowledge sharing on the quality of information and knowledge transfer. Not only does translation play a selective role in the transfer of science, literature, and art into receptor languages and cultures, but it also fulfils a reconstituting function in managing knowledge. With advent of the Internet and satellite television, the process of translation-mediated knowledge transfer has been accelerated

This paper focuses on translation into Arabic as a means of cross-cultural knowledge transfer and the impact of translation mediation on receptor languages and cultures, where both the internet and satellite media are pushing the boundaries of ideology and tradition of cultures and communities in transition. Tradition provides stability for communities while ideology provides legitimacy for the knowledge, values and attitudes of these communities. This paper argues that for social and political change to happen, ideology must be able to reconcile the potential change, and examines the role of translation in changing tradition through ideology. A descriptive analytical interpretive approach will be taken.

Keywords: Ideology, tradition, translation-mediation, knowledge transfer, change management, globalization

INTRODUCTION

ON AN EMIRATES FLIGHT TO SINGAPORE an announcement in English warned drug smugglers of *Capital Punishment*. The Arabic announcement of the same that followed translated *Capital Punishment* as *Maximum Punishment*. As a translator, it bugged me all the way back to Australia, and talking about it later to my monolingual English speaking Aussie daughter, she told me with conviction that it was the travellers' responsibility to know about the laws of the country they were visiting. Based on what they teach them at school, ignorance of the law is no excuse. Rightly so! But from a translation perspective, rendering *Capital Punishment* as *Maximum Punishment* violates the laws and norms of accuracy and precision and the principle of the four corners of the document. It also raises the question of whether the deviation from these rules is inadvertent or motivated.

Should it be the former, one would pass it as a serious Quality Assurance issue that can be ranked, measured and perhaps rectified if it is not too late and if the cost is not too prohibitive, although the legal and human consequences of the initial mistake and subsequently not correcting it can only be speculated as no known cases of prosecution resulting from erroneous translations of this nature have been reported. Imagine the scenario of a traveller arrested, tried, convicted and executed for bringing into the country a small quantity of marijuana for recreational use. Would a correct translation, warning him or her that they would face certain death if they brought drugs into the country, have prevented such a consequence? The legal and moral responsibility of failing to communicate the correct message through translation can only be assessed in terms of the outcome of such failure. In this case a tragic one. People who solely rely on translation for making decisions have the right to receive the correct information, and those who provide such information through translation have the legal and moral obligation to provide a safe translation that does not cause harm or injury or result in legal lawsuits and penalties. They have the obligation to transfer knowledge undistorted, or uncompromised, and with its potential benefits and risks.

However, should it be the latter—that is, motivated, a more serious problem is presented because not only does it put the translation user in harm's way, but it also violates the basic principles upon which translation work is premised, namely truth and equal authenticity. Such deviations may be motivated primarily by ideology, tradition or both. The interplay between ideology and tradition in knowledge transition is critical in managing cross-cultural production. Throughout recorded history translation has been blamed for major distortions and deviations from the original message, in religion, politics and law, among other things. This is indicative of how problematic translation is in the great commerce of knowledge exchange among nations. Certainly, translation plays a selective role in the transfer of science, literature and art into receptor languages and cultures. It also, as I argue here, more seriously fulfils a reconstituting function in managing knowledge transfer and social and cultural change.

Resistance Is Futile

Leonardo da Vinci once said, "It's easier to resist at the beginning than at the end". As people receive information from foreign sources they gradually build a dependency on this mode of knowledge transfer and a degree of tolerance is accommodated when deviations from the norm are detected. As Toury (2005) contends, though no such claim has been ascertained in the Arab culture for example, translations that deviate from sanctioned patterns are often tolerated to a greater degree than equally deviant original texts. However, for cultures that rely on translation for most of their contemporary knowledge, translation-mediated knowledge transfers presented as "original" target language texts often pass as authentic originals and surreptitiously contribute to social and cultural change. This is nowhere more obvious than in the media, and more specifically news reporting. Often the bulk of news stories are translated from foreign sources and packaged and presented as authentic originals in the target language. Consequently, globalized downstream Internet and satellite media-driven knowledge transfer presents a critical problem in cross-cultural change management. Downstream knowledge transfer refers to the direction of information flows from advanced, often called elite nations, to developing or less advanced nations. While the term does not necessarily imply condescension it does connote a two-way vertical master-slave perspective of the quality of information and, by extension, knowledge that is being transferred from the source. Writing constructs reality and translation reconstructs an already constructed reality in another cultural environment that has its own systems of meaning; beliefs, values, traditions and ideologies. As Law (1999) observes, "unless you are prepared to give up something valuable you will never be able to truly change at all, because you'll be forever in the control of things you can't give up" (Law, 1999, p. 86). In most situations, tradition is seen as a valuable aspect of a sustained society. For change to gain acceptance it has to be seen as authentic and to have the social and cultural apparatus that will give it legitimacy through ideology or tradition or the interplay of both.

No doubt, information flows bring about inevitable change—social, cultural, political, economic and so on. The rate of such change is controlled by the speed of information flows and the degree of receptiveness on the part of receptor nations and their willingness to change. With the advent of the Internet and satellite television, the process of translation-mediated knowledge transfer has been accelerated. Prior to that, information flows were slow and the impact of cultural interactions on social and cultural change had been somewhat restricted to the privileged few in society. While domestic television stations, mostly state-run, had in the past played the role of knowledge gatekeepers, censoring deemed untoward social and cultural values, these values managed to filter through. The American "Honey! I'm home!" model, for example, had been purveyed by the media as the ideal model of modern marriage. With wider reach and accessibility, both the Internet and transnational satellite television have dramatically changed the situation, and to remain with our example, this model has now been replaced with Sex and the City model. While the bulk of Internet

knowledge content is in English, online media in local languages represent a considerable amount of information and satellite television still registers a higher percentage. In this connection, ideology plays a major part in translation. So does tradition. The interplay of ideology and tradition invariably results in resolving the dynamic tension that builds when *new* or imported knowledge creates cognitive dissonance. In this paper, I examine the interlocking role of ideology and tradition in translation in general and more specifically in translation-mediated news stories in a globalized downstream Internet and satellite media-driven knowledge transfer.

Translation and Cultural Reproduction

It may come as a shock to intellectuals to discover that knowledge and social change are being shaped by translation. Translation is a central activity in the transfer of knowledge, beliefs and values across cultures and civilizations and in mediating reality and reproduction of cultures. It is also responsible for many distortions, ambiguities and infelicities. The world we live in today is a mediated world in the sense that almost everything we experience is conveyed through something else. Most of our experiences in life are now mediated through television, and our models for behaviour, our values, principles and aspirations are mediated through the media. Journalism not only informs us about the world we live in; it also reinforces certain representations of a fragmented, selective reality. Where does translation fit into this scheme of things? Almost everything the media brings to us from other parts of the world is translated in one form or another. Whether it is a rewrite of a text in the same language, using textual artefacts from various sources, or a translation from another language, the information we receive is translated information that has undergone a series of changes and transformations, driven and or constrained by internal and external factors. Without understanding the process and the underlying complexities of translation mediation, our perception of reality will be shaped not only by the desire of the powers that be to present the truth or reality in a certain manner, conditioned or reflexive, but also by the shortcomings of translation that may involuntarily steer the presentation of the truth in a certain direction that is not intended in the first place. The tension and conflict between these two poles need to be closely studied to avoid haphazard and indiscriminate resolutions of perceived problems.

Clash of the Titans

As I observe in a previous work¹, throughout history, changing group behaviour has succeeded only when the change has been sanctified, ideologized and or decreed. In societies that are rapidly transforming and transitioning into modernity, the pace of change causes a higher degree of tension between behaviours and culture that results in cognitive dissonance between the established norms of behaviour and the sudden and dramatic cultural changes brought about for example by such an

¹ See Darwish, (2009). *Social Semiotics of Arabic Satellite Television: Beyond the Glamour*,

influential instrument as the media, and more to the point satellite television. In such a state of dynamic tension, the dissonance is resolved through changing our behaviour, justifying our behaviour by changing the conflicting cognition, or justifying our behaviour by adding new cognitions through sanctification, ideologization or enactment (Darwish, 2009).

Moreover, text producers are motivated by a variety of drivers: personal, psychological, cultural, political, ideological and historical, and it is important to ensure that the original message is not lost or distorted beyond recognition. However, anecdotal evidence informs us that most translators make arbitrary choices and decisions. As I observe in a separate research into the translation process as a decision making process under constraints, "translators must be able to examine their translations in the presence of constraints and must be able to make informed decisions about their choices in order to achieve optimal approximation of the translation product to the original text. Such approximation is a two-way process that is constrained by an inherent confliction. On the one hand, the translator must strive to approximate the translation product to the original text in terms of message, meaning and communicative and informative intents. On the other, the translator must approximate the translation product to the norms, conventions and standards of the target language. In the presence of uncertainty, these constraints become stronger and more salient forcing the translator to adopt translation strategies that often fail to produce optimal approximations" (Darwish 2009, p.283-284).

Furthermore, translation takes place in various situations and environments where the actor (translator) may change locations, and linguistic, cultural, ideological, temporal and or spatial affinities and perspectives in accordance with a sense of affinity that is informed by tradition and ideology. These interactive and interdependent influential variables consciously and unconsciously influence the actor's cognitive behaviour, responses, and attitudes to both source language and target language realities. They also influence the actor's cognitive and affective responses to the source text and product, and ultimately affect the nature, focus, quality and pace of knowledge transfer. Situational affinity is affinity that is specific to a certain situation. It may be consistent across situations or it may vary from situation to situation. For example, human suffering and the dignity of human beings may have an overriding situational effect in certain contexts, such as torture, or natural disaster, while ideology and dogma may dominate in other situations, depending on how different people react and interact with the situation. A person may justify torture for the greater good of society or in order to save lives. Another person may have exactly the opposite view. Consequently, situational affinity may act as a reinforcing positive or negative factor in defining the overall translation strategy. In terms of text, language and culture, situational affinity may influence the translator's perspective on the content of the text he or she is translating. Basically, there are two text-based affinities: source text affinity and target text affinity. Where the translator finds and defines themselves vis-à-vis the text will depend on their sense of affiliation to the source or target language, culture, system of meanings and body of knowledge, which is often driven by their tradition-ideology frame of reference.

Cross-Cultural Knowledge Transfer and Knowledge Gatekeepers

Knowledge transfer between nations is usually thought of as the transfer of technical information from one advanced nation to the other less advanced nations by some means or tool of transfer. But in global cross-cultural settings, knowledge transfer is not restricted to the transfer of technical information. It also encompasses other types of information and social and cultural values that are also conveyed in the transfer, which are determined by the delivery medium. As Dixon (2000) argues, knowledge is transferred most effectively when the process suits the knowledge being transferred. Largely, this will determine the mode of knowledge transfer, which may be formal, semi-formal or informal. Knowledge transfer within the downstream framework of global media is informal and unstructured. Using the Internet and watching satellite television is generally informal and irregular although these media are increasingly habit-forming and addictive. Yet the role of these media a gatekeeper of knowledge is systematic and regular. More often it is driven by ideology and tradition. Editorial decisions and institutional tradition play a decisive role in what information is broadcast. As Schudson (2003) observes, television news shows are cultural institutions that purvey information, ideas, and attitudes. Consequently, they contribute to social and cultural change in more ways than just the transmission of “neutral” information.

Translation, Ideology, Tradition and Cultural Production

Tradition is often thought of as a stabilizing factor in the sustainability of social groups. Yet contrary to the common belief, tradition itself is not static. It is constantly changing and adapting to new situations. For tradition to survive it needs a reinforcing agent. That reinforcing agent is often ideology, which provides legitimacy for the knowledge, values, beliefs and attitudes of these social groups. The change however is usually slow and intergenerational. As “tradition” is handed over from generation to generation, it is constantly changing. Consequently, tradition is continually being reconstructed and reproduced although the continued unfolding of tradition is usually denied by fundamentalist traditionalists, as Eisenstadt (2006) observes. In this sense, Hobsbawm (1983) argues that traditions which appear or claim to be quite old are often recent in origin and sometimes invented.

Between Tradition and Ideology

Like most umbrella terms, “tradition” does not seem to have a precise definition. Most research on tradition avoids direct operational definitions and prefers a roundabout description or discussion of this and similar concepts. Linguistically, the English language dictionary defines “tradition” as: (1) the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information, etc., from generation to

generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice; (2) a mode of thought or behavior followed by a people continuously from generation to generation; a custom or usage; (3) a set of such customs and usages viewed as a coherent body of precedents influencing the present; (4) a body of unwritten religious precepts; (5) a time-honored practice or set of such practices. In languages that do not share Latin roots, or that have not adopted the term “tradition” as loan translation, the problem of precision presents itself in the multiplicity of synonyms bilingual dictionaries offer for the term “tradition”. Nonetheless, these counterpart terms all have one thing in common: habits, customs and practices, conventions and usage, which are established as part of the general social psyche.

Tradition, Ideology and the Moral Rule

Tradition in certain cultures is more persistent and resistant to change. When sudden social change happens, through the media in this case, it has a dramatic effect on cultural production. In decision making, whenever one is faced with two alternatives of conflicting moral values, one creates a hypothetical third—“a decision maker in a situation of undecidedness about two alternatives, might invent a hypothetical transitive alternative that would help the decision maker to choose either alternative” (Darwish, 2009, p. 50)—or he or she invokes what is known as the moral rule in order to justify either alternative. The moral rule defines the boundaries of what a person is allowed to do. The moral rule derives its moral authority from two sources: tradition and ideology. Tradition justifies an action because it is the way things have been done and ideology provides the acceptable frame of reference for that action.

Again, a precise definition of ideology still deludes researchers, and the overlap of ideology and dogma has been noticed in the discussions of ideology, perhaps because ideology has had negative connotations in the past and has been pitted against tradition. As Freedon (2003) observes, ideology is a word that evokes strong emotional responses. Freedon (2003) offers the following definition of political ideology.

“A political ideology is a set of ideas, beliefs, opinions and values that exhibit a recurring pattern, are held by significant groups, compete over providing and controlling plans for public policy, and do so with the aim of justifying, contesting, or changing the social and political arrangements and processes of a political community” (Freedon, 2003, p. 32) .

The similarity between this definition of ideology and the fuzzy definitions of tradition raises the question about the differences between them. Both tradition and ideology seek to control and justify social actions and outcomes. The difference seems to lie in the fact that tradition seeks to keep things as they are, despite the dynamic nature of tradition, while ideology seeks to change things. Consequently, the interplay between tradition and ideology results in ideology acting as a stabilizing factor. How does this relate to translation?

Tacit and Explicit Knowledge and the Translation Tradition

Unquestionably, in seeking to stabilize and justify translation-mediated social and cultural change ideology skews the intentions of the original message and creates a new reality that is not intended by the originator of the message. Ideology justifies certain choices whether by reflexive, subconscious decisions informed by tradition at large or more specifically translation tradition, or by premeditated, conscious decisions purely on the basis of ideological production, which is not the same as cultural production, as Lovell (1980) has argued. “It can, however, be confidently assumed that the artefacts of cultural production will be important bearers of ideology” (Lovell, 1980, p. 56). A prime example that illustrates the tension between ideology and tradition is the translational production of *God* and *Allah*. The decision to translate (Allah) as (Allah) and treat the word as a loan translation from Arabic into English is invariably source-focused. It is a decision informed by tradition and driven by ideology that perpetuates traditional translation practices. However, whether the translation of (Allah) is aimed at non-Arabic speaking Muslims or non-Muslims at large, the loan translation does create a conceptual reality of the word that may not necessarily be the same conceptual reality the word (Allah) in Arabic evokes among Arabic speakers. For non-Muslims, the word (Allah) in English text may evoke the notion that (Allah) is not (God) — another deity that Muslims worship, thus creating an ideological illusion and rift between cultures. For Muslims who do not speak Arabic, the notion that (Allah) is not the same as (God) is also a serious possibility. To reverse the situation, translating (God) as (Allah) or as (ar-rabb), that is, (the Lord), from English into Arabic is target-focused and is also motivated by ideology that results in the same cognitive and conceptual chasm. This kind of translational reproduction takes place in translation-mediated television, in voiceovers, subtitling and other forms of audiovisual modalities. It is not restricted to religious texts. Whatever the outcome of such mediations is and regardless of which approach is valid and the entrenched views associated with it, the fact remains that both tradition and ideology “conspire” to produce a translation that ensures acceptability. This is just one example of a complex process that is driven by ideology. Other examples of (itifadah) versus (uprising), (istishhad) versus (suicide bombing) and a lot more, are also sites of serious tradition and ideology interplay.

In the typical traditional dichotomy of western thinking, the literature on epistemology and knowledge management has treated tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge as two separate states of knowledge. Knowledge sharing thus seeks to turn tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge by “translating” what is in the minds of *experts* into a verbal expression, which is “the piece of prose that results from the writing activity” (Kane & Peters, 1966 , p. 7), and by extension any actualization of thought in language. However, as the example above has illustrated, tacit knowledge often coexists with explicit knowledge to provide the shared experience or inter-subjectivity required to enable the reader to make sense of the explicit knowledge they receive. Consequently, communication fails because of absence of intersubjectivity and inability to place the communication in the right context or

frame of reference. Intersubjectivity (between two or more subjects) refers to the shared knowledge between communicators or between writer and reader. In communication, knowledge shared by social actors who belong to the same culture or subculture, or more specifically individual responses to communication, is known as intersubjectivity (after Hewes and Planalp, 1987). Often, tacit knowledge is where ideology and tradition lurk and conspire to produce cultural realities.

Conclusion

It may be argued that translation in peacetime is a luxury, sometimes a nuisance, and in wartime a necessity. Where there are disputes and conflicts among nations, translation is brought to the fore as more serious issues are at stake. The foregoing discussion has sought to highlight how ideology and tradition interact in translation to reproduce culture in a media-driven context. Goethe (1749–1832) once asserted that the translator must act “as mediator in this commerce of the mind, making it his business to further this intellectual exchange. For whatever one might say about the inadequacy of translation, nevertheless it is and will remain one of the most important and worthy occupations in the general intertraffic between peoples.”² However, it is an occupation that is easily subject to ideological manipulations.

A few years ago, the British naturalist and television presenter David Attenborough told us a story of a unique species of dogs that lived in Africa. Their way of creating social cohesion was to lick each other's tongues by way of greeting. At some point they contracted a virus that killed them all off and the species became extinct. Ironically, their means of social cohesion, their traditional practice, was the cause of their extinction. Unlike the “tradition” of this hapless species, human traditions are constantly changing and the change is counterbalanced by ideology to ensure stability, adaptability and a smooth transition from tradition to tradition.

² Quoted in McFarlane, J. (1953). *Modes of Translation*. The Durham University Journal. Vol XLV, No 3. June 1053. UK.

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