The 'usual' questions of Translation Studies in an 'unusual' situation of translation: translation into a dead(?) language

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Introduction

While dealing with translation or with Translation Studies one usually faces a mediation between *contemporary languages* or from an *earlier-formed language, or not (so) living* into a living language. Situations where it is not the source language (SL) but the target language (TL) that is *linked to the past* are much less common, both in scholarship and practice. However, both new works and translations are currently being created in dead languages, especially in Latin language.

I use the terms "earlier formed", "not (so) living", and "linked to the past" here because I find them more precise than the commonly used "dead". The changes, the different states in the "development" of a language follow each other in a continuum, thus if we call Ancient Greek "dead", we should also call 16th century English "dead" or at least "half-dead". That is why I put a question mark after the word "dead" in the title. With out addressing the philosophical question "What makes a dead language dead?" here, I will use the term "dead" throughout this article for ease of prose and focus my efforts on addressing on the translation-bound aspects of the languages that are "linked to the past".

In my paper I address the challenges of translating into a dead language. The questions are often raised in Translation Studies, and could have been inspired by the content of almost any introductory book of the discipline. In this case, they are based on Klaudy Kinga's *Languages in Translation*. The book gives a concise overview and well-organized insight into Translation Studies. The theoretical answers I present to these basic questions are universal in the sense that they refer to any written translation from a written text into a dead language.

To support my theoretical statements I use examples from one book in particular: the Latin translation of *Winnie-the-Pooh* by Lénárd Sándor. I chose to discuss the Latin translation of this book because of its popularity in its SL and its potential practicality in its Latin form. Additionally, Lénárd's writings tell us a great deal about the antecedents and circumstances of his translation.

What makes the situation of translation "unusual"?

The reason why this situation of translation is unusual is not (only) because this direction of mediation is rare, one also has to consider the extralinguistic factors of a situation. In case of dead languages — and similarly to artificial languages — they are not likely to be the first language for any person today. Without the obvious choice of the first-language audience, it is quite uncertain who the TL receiver is: anyone who has a command of a TL on a certain level is a potential receiver. However, unlike artificial languages, in the case of dead languages there is a socio-cultural context associated with it. This cultural context belongs to the past, when the language was still living. Thus TL readers of a dead language have a different attitude to the language and culture of the TL text: they usually know them, but do not live in them. This separation has some effect on the whole translation.

So the reason why the situation of translation is unusual in case of dead languages is the fact that TL context belongs to the past. In case of the *Winnie-the-Pooh* the translator was warned by the publisher of the same problem, in a rather humorous way:

> Igen tisztelt Professzor Úr, megkaptuk kitüntető kéziratát, és készséggel ki is adtuk volna. Sajnos a munka pontosan 1900 év késéssel érkezett meg hozzánk. Vélhetőleg a postai késés egy eklatáns esetéről van szó. Minő veszteség az olvasóközönség számára! Ilyen körülmények között meg fogja érteni, hogy, már csak a további időveszteséget is megakadályozandó, a kéziratot futárral küldjük vissza. (Lénárd 2003b: 153)
>
> [Dear Professor, we received your honourable manuscript and we would have been ready to publish it. Unfortunately, your work arrived 1900 years late. It must be a special case of postal delays. What a loss for the public! Considering the circumstances you'll understand that, in order to avoid any further delays, we are sending you the manuscript by courier.] (my translation)

However, Lénárd sees fairly well who the potential readers of the translation are going to be: "humanists" i.e. Latinists, Latin teachers and students of Latin. (Lénárd 2003b)

What is the function of translation?

The main task of mediating between languages is to make sure the SL text will be decipherable for the TL recipient. The function of a translation in the TL culture can be various: simple transmission of information, enlarging repertoires of genres, renewing a national language, or in the case of dead languages, as part of a program of language resurrection.

When the TL is a dead language, the TL text can hardly play the same or even a similar function as the SL text does in the SL culture because the TL culture belongs to the past. The translators themselves are well aware of this fact: translations into a dead language are quite often considered 'self-contained'. They are born not to satisfy TL receivers' request but rather as result of a SL receiver's passion towards the TL and the practice is often for self-motivated reasons such as entertainment or a demonstration of skills.

Lénárd Sándor was giving private lessons in Brazil when he made the decision to create the proper text for a Latin lesson: the beloved *Winnie-the-Pooh*, which had been so useful in his English lessons, translated into Latin:

> Mi lett volna egyszerűbb, mint egyenesen latinra fordítani és felhasználni? Minden XVII. századi vidéki orvos képes volt arra, hogy megírjon egy latin levelet. […] Annyival butább volna a magunkfajta, hogy ne tudna egy marék fecsegést lefordítani? (Lénárd 2003b 148)
>
> [What else would have been simpler than to translate it into Latin and just use it? Any doctor in the 17th century was able to write a letter in Latin. […] Why wouldn't I be intelligent enough to translate a handful of chit-chat?] (my translation)

Lénárd's translation filled a gap and enlarged the repertoire of the Latin literature, as there were no tales of this kind in the ancient times. At the same time, his main aim is to teach the dead language in an engaging way. Last but not least, his translation fulfils a desire to prove he has mastered the language sufficiently.

How is the pragmatic adaptation realized?

A translated work needs to meet TL readers' expectations. This applies to a dead language as well, although it does so in a special way. We can use Lambert's theory of intercultural translation to address these expectations. (Klaudy 2003) Although Lambert uses this idea to discuss how communication rules have been changed by the internationalization of political and economic institutions, I think his concepts can be applied to translations into dead languages as well, as there is no binary opposition between the SL readers and TL readers.

What is the product of the translation?

The product of the translation is worth being analysed from the perspective of both the dialectal and sociolectal characteristics and from the point of view of rendering of the lexis without equivalence. (Klaudy 2003)

How to reflect varieties of the language in the translation?

If the dialectal and/or sociolectal varieties of a dead language are well documented and parallels can be drawn with the varieties of the SL, the translation poses no more difficulties compared than a translation into a living language.

However, in *Winnie-the-Pooh* sociolectal phenomena can challenge the translator. The story is humorous, and the pets speak a very eloquent way, not unlike if they were Oxford professors or aristocrats from the House of Lords. Lénárd identified this attribute clearly and found the necessary style in the prose of Roman senator. Their particular manner of speaking is well known from the writings of Cicero. (Lénárd 2003a) The best example of that is voiced by Ior: while reading his Latin sentence, any TL reader — even a beginner — must think immediately of Cicero's often-quoted words against Catilina.

(1) – This modern Behind-the-ears nonsense. (Milne 1976: 123)
(1a) – O tempora, o mos ablutionis retroauricularis! (Lénárd 1996: 89)

How to reflect the lexis without equivalence or culture-bound concepts?

The presence of culture-bound concepts (characterizing a given language community while not characterizing the other one) depends on the content of the text as well as on the relationship between the languages involved in the translation situation.

There are not necessarily more culture-bound concepts in a translation into a dead language than in a translation between contemporary languages (as we can imagine a translation situation between two contemporary languages with very different cultural contexts), but they are likely to be of a different kind, and attributable to the 'time shift' between the SL and TL.

In case of dead languages words might appear as lexis without equivalence of a particular kind, words whose existence in the past is very likely to have been, but due to the lack of proper documentation "nobody knows how they said…"

Another problem unique to translating into a dead language is deciding which state of the language is to be considered the point of reference. This is especially true of languages documented over a long period of time, and when this documentation includes important changes in the language. Similarly, translation faces a challenge when a period of a higher esteem lacks the concepts present in a period of lower esteem, as is the case with the relationship between Classical and Medieval Latin.

By translating or adopting culture-bound concepts, one must consider what the TL society knows or thinks about the culture-bound concepts of the SL more than the language norms of the SL. (Klaudy 2003) However, in the case of a text in dead language the reader might know what the concepts refer to even if they are not adapted, as (s)he might be more familiar with the SL context than with the TL one.
This opposes the opinions of the Latin purists, who prefer a Latin which could be understood even by the ancient Romans!

As far as Lénárd is concerned, he definitely does not follow the purists: he counts on readers who are familiar with the SL culture as well, as can be seen in these examples:

(1) Winnie-the-Pooh
(1a) Winnie ille Pu
(2) balloon (Milne 1976: 12)

(2a) folliculus (Lénárd 1996: 5)

(3) buttered toast (Milne 1976: 48)

(3a) panis tostatus cum butyro (Lénárd 1996: 35)

(1a) loan translation, in order to recognize the original form easily

 (2a) extension of the original meaning of "folliculus"

(3a) looks like a transliteration but it is rather an open explanation. Interestingly, the word could have been omitted as irrelevant from the point of view of the story, but Lénárd sticks to it and in doing so, gives preference to the SL

What about the process of the translation? How is it made? How can it be revised?

In case of dead languages the translator's task is harder not only because (s)he has to translate into a non-mother tongue but also because (s)he has no chance to discuss with native speakers... It offers little comfort that perhaps there is a little leeway because the TL reader is unlikely to be as sensitive to the inevitable breaks with the norms of the language as would be the case if the text was in the reader's mother tongue.

However the translator is not left entirely alone: (s)he has the chance to discuss with specialists as well as to consult — albeit fully unidirectionally — with the native authors of the past. If a large amount of texts shaped in a dead language are available, then it is likely possible to find more or less similar sentences to the sentences of the translation to be created. This can be considered as a sort of guarantee for the correctness of text. This process was once long and tiring work, but now goes much quicker and more easily due to the corpora.

Lénárd corrected his first translation by using Quicherat's great French-Latin dictionary, then he found his ancient "revisers" in the main library of São Paulo: a series of Latin authors and the *Thesaurus totius Latinitatis* (Dictionary of the whole Latinity). As a result of this kind of revision "a régi orvosok döcögő mondatai eltűntek a szövegből, mely lassan Horatius, Apuleius és Vergilius darabkáiból álló mozaikká lett. Izgatónak látszott az a kérdés, hogy az eredeti minden mondatát megelőlegezték-e római szerzők…" (Lénárd 2003b: 151) ["the clumsy sentences in doctors' Latin disappeared from the text, which started to become a mosaic of pieces from Horatius, Apuleius and Vergilius. It seemed exciting to ask whether every sentence had been taken from Roman authors…"] (my translation)

After years of work and still without publishing, he sent his work to some "humanists" to ask for their opinion. They gave him some useful advice, which made the translation sound

even more Latin. With a slow schedule for the book's publication, Lénárd had time to keep improving the language of the *Winnie ille Pu*, looking for nice Latinisms in the works of Plinius Minor. (Lénárd 2003b)

How to avoid *'translationese'*?

'Translationese' implies a very smooth strangeness which cannot really be felt at the level of sentences. (Klaudy 2003: 63-64) As such, the above-mentioned *'pseudo-revising'* doesn't seem to avoid this problem. Moreover, *'retro-revising'* might lead to a smooth dislocation of emphasis or a subtle distortion of functional perspective, as it works with isolated sentences. With these methods there is a very little chance to find parallels between larger units of texts, even if they were of the same gender.

Corpora might help here as well, as it can make it easier to analyse and comprehend the cohesive devices that characterize the language.

However, I don't think there is any way of entirely avoiding translationese.

Conclusion

The reason why the situation of translation is unusual in case of dead languages is the fact that TL context belongs to the past. Therefore the TL text is not expected to play the same (or even similar) function in the TL culture as the SL text plays in the SL culture. Translations into a dead language can be often a bit 'self-contained', born not for the purpose of meeting the needs of potential TL receivers but rather a product of the SL receiver's passion towards the TL. It is quite uncertain who the TL receiver is. There is no binary opposition between SL reader and TL reader.

There are not necessarily more culture-bound concepts in a translation into a dead language than in a translation between contemporary languages but they are of a different kind. When translating or adapting these culture-bound concepts often it is better to take the SL norms as a starting point. If there is a large amount of documents born in a dead language is available then the translator can turn to earlier written texts as well, however, this kind of 'pseudo-revising' or this 'retro-revising' doesn't seem to avoid the problem of 'translationese'.

The 'usual' questions that Translation Studies asks about translations into dead languages seem to lead to 'unusual' answers. These investigations deepen our knowledge of

the complicated issue of translating into dead languages, and also broaden the horizons of Translation Studies.

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Source texts

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