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SOURCE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE INTERFERENCE IN TRANSLATION

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Abstract

The translation is a process that goes beyond linguistic transformations and demands cross-cultural awareness. However, mistakes resulting from apparently similar linguistic structures in the source and target language as well as narrow cultural views can compromise the quality of the translated text. Therefore, the target audience may lose the thread of the text line or be completely misled. The goal of this paper is to discuss the concepts of the first language and cultural interference in the translation process as well as to bring forward some examples of frequent loan translations resulting from this phenomenon. Attempts to translate culture-specific patterns will be illustrated and the applied translation strategies analysis will confirm or refute their efficiency in bringing the source culture closer to the target audience.

Keywords: interference, transference, loan translation, cross-cultural awareness

INTRODUCTION

The ambivalent nature of interference has stirred many discussions around the concept. The main discrepancy underlying it is whether it belongs to translation universals or contradicts the idea that first-language interference generates language features different from the source language. In this sense, scholars developed theories based on hypotheses either advocating the impact of the differences between the source and the target language systems on translated texts or denying their exclusiveness.

Despite the tendency to separate the interference approach to translation (Baker, 1993) and the interference approach to second language acquisition (Toury, 1995: 259, Weinreich, 1953: 49), the phenomenon of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural transfer is unquestionable. Yet, the extent of interlingual and intercultural influence on the translated text may vary being determined by some factors which may cause technical mistakes as well as produce some effects in the target language or fail to convey the intended meaning. Given

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these facts, the goal of this paper is to assess the outcomes resulting from the source language and cultural interference in the translated text from English into Romanian.

Levels of Language Interference

A broad concept, interference occurs at multiple levels which may affect linguistic and extralinguistic aspects of the translated text. More scholars (Weinreich, 1953, Toury, 1995, Mauranen, 2004 :65, etc.) acknowledge the systemic character of interference as a translation reality conditioned by factors such as differences between language systems and cultures, bilingualism, tolerance of interference, language processing, etc. They presented their views in theories that discuss aspects of language systems and their impact on the translated text.

The translation universals theory (Baker, 1993) denies the impact of the source language on the translated text claiming that “the language features in the translated text are independent of the source text influence”. The research data obtained through contrastive corpus analyses showed that the translated text is a product that undergoes transformations such as simplification, explicitation, normalization, discourse transfer, and distinctive distribution of lexical items and contains features different from the ST as well as from the TL original writings. These features of the translated language are often referred to as “translational language”, “translationese” or “the third code” which means that the translated text gains a new linguistic dimension.

Contradictory to Baker’s view is Toury’s law of interference (1995: 275), which states that there is a tendency for the source language features to be transferred to the target language irrespective of the positive or negative effects it has on the translated text. On the one hand, it is the mental processing phenomenon that is an indisputable part of the translation process. The more language features a translator must reinvent in the translation process, the higher the probability of first-language interference. Tremendous mental processing effort during translation is necessary during the simultaneous activation of SL and TL systems. When two language systems come into contact, during translation or in the case of bilingual speakers, they influence each other, and the speaker/translator may rely on the apparent similarities in lexical, grammatical, and phonetic patterns and use them inappropriately. These patterns may result in the translators’ use of false friends, distortion of meaning, and loan translations which make translated

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text sound or look unnatural. The inexperienced pre-service translators are prone to making mistakes because of first-language interference.

Furthermore, traces of interference may be found in the speech of bilingual or multilingual speakers. Because of the tight connection between linguistic codes, bilingual/multilingual speakers may deviate from the norms of either language. When speaking or writing, users operating two or more languages will consciously or mechanically switch codes and when doing so, features of the dominant language will “shine through”. Therefore, mental processing plays a major role during translation since decoding a message from one language and encoding it in another involves some decision-making regarding the patterns to be chosen for the appropriate transfer of form, meaning, style, and intention.

Cultural Interference

The translation goes beyond cross-language transfer; source culture may impact the target culture in translation and the extent of the target culture’s acceptability in translation is conditioned by some factors. One factor is the sociocultural setting where the translation is made and consumed. Cultural differences may also determine the translators to look for ways of explaining, finding analogies, or reinventing situations that do not exist in his/her first language in the target text. The more distant the SC (source culture) and the TC (target culture), the more plausible the cultural interference in the translated text.

Another factor that determines cultural interference derives from the idea that in translation, features from major, influential cultures are more likely to be accepted and tolerated by minor cultures. An example might be transferring source culture-specific elements into the target language, these being rather foreignized in the TC through borrowing, intertextual, or extratextual gloss. Taken from a different perspective, the abundance of foreignized cultural items in translation may complicate target readers’ comprehension of the overall message or slow down the decoding of implied meanings such as in the case of allusion, metaphor, irony, humour, and the translation of other rhetorical devices. It requires reliable norms for both languages.

In the case of idiom translation, cultural interference can result in the loss of the connotative effect or distortion of meaning. Many idioms appear to carry a similar meaning in the source and target language, but the reality is that the meaning may be partially or totally different in the target language. For

example, the idiom *to have butterflies in one's stomach*, which means *to be nervous*, is often translated as *a avea fluturi în stomac* which means *to be in love* in Romanian. Despite some emotional connection between the feelings of nervousness and love, the meanings of these two idioms differ, hence the connotative effect can be altered in translation because of interference.

The loss of connotative effect may occur in the case of metaphor, simile, allusion, or other stylistic devices. The translator may rely too much on the apparent similarity and translate them using the word-for-word or loan translation method. In other cases, the translators may decide to explain in the footnote the meaning or just make a reference to the stylistic effect they produce. Thus, the translated patterns may partially waste their stylistic effect in case the readers fail to appreciate it.

METHODOLOGY

Scholars have measured language and culture interference in a variety of ways. Some conducted their research on interference in the field of translation studies and built their corpora using empirical methods, while others relied on contrastive analysis or anecdotal evidence. The research data illustrated in this paper were collected using the various source text excerpts and the translated versions provided by undergraduate students as experimental workshops organized during the Translation Studies course. To observe the interlingual transfer from a first to a second language, the students were supposed to translate from their first language Romanian into English and to note the impact of the first language on the target language. Comparative analysis allows for gaining deeper insights into the translation techniques which let the source language and culture slip or shine through the translated text. Despite the difficulty or sometimes the impossibility to measure the extent to which source language/ text/ culture impacts the target text/language/culture in translation, this study will attempt to trace the gain or loss of certain effects produced on the target audience. This may shed more light on some of the factors behind the tendency to stick to the original formal and structural aspects of the source language in translation and discuss the effects that could be qualified as intercultural transfer or interference.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

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To strengthen the hypotheses on first language and culture interference in translation more corpus-based evidence needs to be collected and analysed. A strong relationship between interference and differences between source and target languages has been reported in the scientific literature and confirmed through comparative analysis. Unexperienced translators can fall into the trap of their intuition when being misled and following their first language's linguistic patterns. Lexical, morphological, and syntactical patterns are most likely to interfere with the target language. Consider the instances illustrated below:

Table 1. Lexical interference in translation

Source Text	Target Text 1 (interference)	Target Text 2 (accurate translation)	Translation technique causing interference
Studentii <i>au asistat</i> ieri la o lecție publică.	The students <i>assisted</i> another public lecture.	The students <i>observed</i> another public lecture.	Word for word
She has a very good <i>complexion</i> .	Ea are o <i>complexiție</i> foarte bună.	Ea are un <i>ten</i> foarte frumos.	transliteration
Medicul i-a pus o injecție*	The doctor <i>put</i> him an <i>injection</i> .	The doctor <i>gave</i> him an <i>injection</i> .	Loan translation
<i>Sunt de acord</i> cu el.	<i>I'm agree</i> with him.	I <i>agree</i> with him.	Loan translation

*Phrase used in the Republic of Moldova but not in Romania

These samples might seem simplistic and often result from target language lexical/grammatical gaps, but observations prove that they still occur either in oral or written translations despite pre-service translators' knowledge of vocabulary. In the cases of oral translation, the reason may be the simultaneous activation of both: source and target language systems where the dominant one will influence the mental processing during translation.

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In the case of grammatical interference, loan translation may threaten translation accuracy. Translators and students will intuitively appeal to source language morphological and syntactical patterns. Some examples are presented below:

Table 2. Grammatical interference in translation

Source Text	Target Text 1 *(interference)	Target Text 2 (accurate translation)	Translation technique causing interference
S-au întâlnit în autobuz.	They met <i>in</i> the bus.	They met <i>on</i> the bus.	Loan translation
Vom publica rezultatele cercetării îndată ce le vom primi.	We will publish the research findings <i>as soon as we will get them.</i>	We will publish the research findings <i>as soon as we get them.</i>	Tense shift
Dacă afacerea va aduce profit, vom deschide filiale și în alte localități.	<i>If the business will make a profit, we will open branches in other regions.</i>	<i>If the business makes a profit, we will open branches in other regions.</i>	Tense shift
E nu înțelegea ce se întâmplă.	<i>She didn't realise what is happening.</i>	<i>She didn't realise what was happening.</i>	Tense shift
Nu știu care este problema.	<i>I don't know what is the problem.</i>	<i>I don't know what the problem is.</i>	Word order shift

Besides the instances presented above, there are lexical patterns that mislead the translators and the students who need more experience before providing a qualitative translation output. Those are word-formation patterns, such as

prefixes and suffixes which are somehow invented during the translation process because they give the apparent idea of similarity with those in the target language. Hence very often *stresant* is mistranslated as *stressing* instead of *stressful*, *nevaloros* through *invaluable* instead of *valueless*.

Grammatical interference could be associated with shifts occurring in the translated text at the level of tense, word order, and calque. Hence, the observed students showed signs of interference in their written assignments mostly related to prepositional phrase translation, basically using wrong prepositions following the patterns of those in their mother tongue. Moreover, subject-verb agreement is another section where morphological interference is often detected in translation. Students still make mistakes when the verb agrees with collective nouns, singularia tantum nouns, and multiple subjects. The reason behind these mistakes is that in the students' first language, these nouns agree with the verbs differently than in English.

At the syntactic level, the impact of first language structures shines through the misuse of tenses in various types of clauses such as time, conditional, and relative clauses. In the case of reported speech, it is not only the tenses that are translated according to the first language model but the word order is also violated because of interference.

Regarded from the phonetic point of view, interference is mostly traced in oral speech/translation. Thus, the observations of students translating from English into Romanian confirm the premise that the pronunciation of some sounds can be intuitively performed following the first language pattern due to the similarities in spelling which give an apparent feeling that the pronunciation is the same. Despite the likeness in spelling, some sounds in English are silent but in Romanian, they are not. Therefore, pre-service translators/ students may mispronounce words in terms of reading the letters following the spelled patterns. The same phenomenon occurs at the level of stress when the students/translators follow the first language stress pattern. This may result in meaning distortion since the meaning of some English words such as *desert*, *record*, *minute*, and *greenhouse*, is determined by the stress position. Most of the time, still, phonetic interference complicates the comprehension of the translated text without necessarily distorting its meaning as exemplified below:

Table 3. Phonetic interference in translation

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Source Text	Target Text 1 *(interference)	Target Text 2 (accurate translation)	Translation technique causing interference
A determina Photograph	Determine /dɪtɜː'maɪn/ /fəʊtə 'grɑːf/	determine/dɪ'tɜːmɪn / /'fəʊtəgrɑːf/	Change of stress
Psihic	Psychic /'psɪhɪk/	Psychic /'saɪkɪk/	
hypothesis	Hypothesis /ɪpə'θɜːsɪs/	/haɪ'pəθ.ə.sɪs/	

One interesting finding is that in the case of multilingual speakers, interference in translation may result not only from their mother tongue but also from other linguistic codes they possess. Thus, in pronunciation, some Romanian-speaking students may follow the sound patterns from French or Russian. The analysis of some observations reveals mistakes in muting the sound /h/ in words such as *hotel*, *helicopter*, and *history* a tendency to pronounce borrowings such as *choir* following the French pattern instead of /'kwaɪə(r)/, and mistranslating it since it has a totally different meaning. Interference also may occur in pronouncing international proper names such as *Poseidon*, *Aesop*, *Oedipus*, *Caesar*, *Lincoln*, and other words such as *leopard*, where the translators/students will rely on the pronunciation model the words originate from or on the way it is pronounced in their first language.

This study also set out with the aim of assessing cultural interference in translated texts. In this sense, the translation of idioms seems to provide appropriate examples of how inexperienced translators/students can be misled by the likeness in the form of idioms in their first language. Some idioms have a striking similarity and produce an illusory effect of connotational resemblance. However, their meanings differ or have a slight cause-and-effect relation but do not mean the same. This is exemplified in the table below:

Table 4. Idiomatic interference in translation

Source Text	Target Text 1 *(interference)	Target Text 2 (Accurate translation)	Translation technique causing interference
A face gaură/bortă în apă	To make a hole in the water (to kill oneself by drowning)	To make no change	Formal equivalence Word-for-word translation
A roade pantalonii (degeaba)	To work one's socks off (to work very hard to achieve something)	To kill time	Formal equivalence
A avea fluturi în stomac	To have butterflies in one's stomach (to be nervous)	To be in love	Formal equivalence Word-for-word translation
A trage mâța de coadă	To pull the cat by its tail	To pull the devil by its tail	Formal equivalence Word-for-word translation
a-i ajunge cuțitul la os	To cut sb to the bone (to hurt sb emotionally)	To be in a critical situation/desperate	explanation

The most obvious finding to emerge from the above sample analysis is that idiom translation involves assessing one's cross-cultural awareness of the target language and culture. Digging deeper into the target culture, translators will discover that different situations can be expressed through similar wording and vice-versa, some idioms have dynamic equivalents in the target language whereas others can be translated through explanation. Thus, in order not to fall into the trap of cultural interference, pre-service translators should analyse the context, check the meaning, and then choose the appropriate translation method.

CONCLUSIONS

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The aim of the present paper was to assess the outcomes resulting from the first language and culture interference on translated text from English into Romanian and to determine the effects it produces in translation. This study confirms the hypothesis that interference in translation is a reality that can occur when translation is conducted from the translator's first language or, in the case of bilingual or multilingual users, when two or more linguistic codes overlap. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is the complexity of the interference phenomenon in translation. It does not affect only some linguistic features; it also can occur during intercultural transfer in translation. Interference in translation results from certain factors and may have consequences varying from mistakes to the loss or reduction of the intended meaning.

The findings of this study suggest that interference at the linguistic level can happen because of first language and target language differences but not only. Factors such as lack of experience, haste, inattention, false friends, intuitive translation, and the dominance of one language over the other in the case of bilinguals during mental processing, may result in errors, confusion, and distortion of meaning.

Interference at the cultural level is more difficult to assess. It depends on the translator's choice of translation technique to convey the intended effect, of target readers' openness to foreign culture acceptance and ability to rapidly elicit the intended meaning from the target context. The current instance inventory, which builds the corpus of this paper, makes these findings less general but is encouraging research growth and corpus expansion.

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