

Globalizing the Local in Today's Market

UNESCO International Symposium "Translation and Cultural Mediation"

22-23 February 2010

International Mother Language Day

Abstract

This paper will attempt to demonstrate the effects of globalization on translation and the concept of cultural identity development in the context of "small languages", taking the example of the Macedonian publishing market and translation practices. Arguing that translation is central to debates about language and cultural identity, and seeing globalization as intrinsically linked to translation, it shows why consideration of the role of translation and translators is a necessary part of safeguarding and promoting linguistic and cultural diversity of cultural production in small languages..

As a cultural practice, translation is deeply implicated in relations of domination and dependence, equally capable of maintaining or disrupting them. In developing countries such as Macedonia, translations have played a critical role in enriching indigenous languages and literatures while supporting reading and publishing. However, this leaves domestic works undersubsidized and limits the development of domestic languages, literatures and readerships.

Conclusions are drawn about the new role of the translator in small countries which is one of *an expert for intercultural communication in an internationalized world.*

Key words: small languages, globalization, literary translation, cultural identity

Presenter:

Marija Todorova
University American College Skopje
Tel: 389 2 2463156
todorova@uacs.edu.mk

Communication, and language as its main vehicle, have taken center stage in today's theoretical debates about globalisation. Defined by Gidens (1990: 64) as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa", globalisation rests on the premise of instant communication and the intensification of global interconnectedness. However, for all its theoretical benefits, the current focus of globalisation theory on mobility, fluidity and disappearance of borders carries the risk of eluding the complexities involved in overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers, threatening to render invisible the key role translation plays in global communications.

Mobility necessarily rests on the need for translation, not only between different languages, but also between various cultural contexts. The absence of this indispensable infrastructure for the global circulation of meaning would make impossible the much lauded free movement of goods, services, capital and people. As Venuti points out (1998:158): "the recent neocolonial projects of transnational corporations, their exploitation of overseas workforce and markets cannot advance without a vast array of translation, ranging from commercial contracts, instruction manuals and advertising copy to popular novels, children's books and film soundtracks."

The need for instant communication has at its foundation a neo-Babelian shift towards reduction of linguistic diversity, "a desire for mutual, instantaneous intelligibility between human beings speaking, writing and reading different languages." (Cronin, 2003: 59). For translation this has meant disappearance from public view, even though its level of intensity has in fact increased significantly. Furthermore, translation is now primarily performed by speakers of other languages from and into the dominant language.

English as a global language

The global dominance of English has been accompanied by a growing demand for translation, for people still prefer to access the goods and services provided by the information economy in their native language, as

witnessed in the growth of localisation services that adapt global products to the needs of specific local markets (Cronin, 2003: 13). As far as the translation values and strategies employed in localisation and e-localisation (website localisation) are concerned, they generally combine elements of both domestication and foreignisation: products need to be brought closer to the expectations of the domestic market, yet they need to retain a certain level of strangeness and 'exoticism' related to technological development.

"Globalization would seem to promote both the lingua franca and the demand for translation" (Pym, 2003: 3). But what does this mean in terms of translation directions, especially in "small" cultures such as Macedonia?

Macedonian language, is a Slavic language with its roots in Old Church Slavonic language, became standardized and officially recognized only in 1944, with the establishment of the Republic of Macedonia as part of then Yugoslavia. The country gained independence in 1991, and today Macedonian is the native language of nearly 1,7 million citizens, and an estimated further 1 million Macedonian living abroad.

In terms of translation from Macedonian into other languages, it can be said that Macedonian literature is virtually non-existent on the world literature map, due to the very small number of works translated, amounting to less than a dozen in a decade.

One look at the statistical data, e.g. UNESCO's *Index Translationum*, the only global translation database, is enough to conclude that English has become the most translated language worldwide. If we focus only on translations from and into Macedonian, for instance, we can see that the number of translations from English into Macedonian is 817, while the number of translations from Macedonian into English is only 198. In comparison, the number of translations from French is 258, while from German is 188. ¹

¹ For more statistics, see the *Index Translationum* since 1932 (under the auspices of UNESCO since 1948, computerized since 1979), annual reports from the European Commission's Translation Service, estimates made by the American Translators Association

The reasons for this disparity can be attributed to several factors, ranging from structural weaknesses to individual publishers' policy. As one of the poorest countries to emerge in the aftermath of the Yugoslav wars, the country never had the necessary funds to establish agencies or foundations that would support translation from Macedonian into other languages, similar to those that exist in many "small" cultures. For a certain period of time in 1990s, this funding gap was temporarily filled by international foundations, such as the Open Society Institute Foundation.

Another key factor is the unfavorable situation in the Macedonian publishing industry. Faced with a very small and poor market which dictates low print runs (usually of no more than 500 copies) and low prices, Macedonian publishers struggle to cover royalties and printing costs. The publishing industry does receive funding annually from the Ministry of Culture, with a focus on publishing primarily domestic authors.² Under such circumstances, publishers increasingly turn to publishing highly commercial works, primarily translations of international and regional bestsellers. Translations of Macedonian writers into other languages is perceived by publishers as not only costly, but also unmarketable and thus highly unprofitable.

A survey conducted among 10 biggest publishing houses showed that they predominantly tend to publish translations rather than domestic authors. The share of domestic authors varies from 50% to 5%, but in average between 15-30% from the total production goes to domestic authors. The languages identified as most translated from include: English, Serbian, Italian, French, Dutch, Bulgarian, and Spanish.

and French official registers.

² 2010 will see the start of a project funded by the Macedonian Ministry of Culture to translate into English and publish a survey of nearly a hundred Macedonian writers, ranging from historic figures to current postmodernist authors.

Furthermore, the research focused on publishing policy, that is the criteria determining which titles/authors will be published. The answers again varied, but two general trends could be observed:

1. The needs of the market; the commercial aspect; most popular foreign books; and
2. The need to strike a balance between the social and commercial effect of the book; the quality of the work, but also its profitability.

It can be concluded that publishing houses in Macedonia are predominantly oriented towards publishing translations from the world's dominant languages, mainly English, or those from the more developed publishing industries in the neighbouring countries. And their publishing policy is primarily driven by commercial interests.

One recent positive aspect (Seraphinoff: 2007):, that should be tapped in and developed further, is the emergence of publishers of translations from Macedonian mainly into English, catering the relatively large Macedonian immigrant communities in Australia, Canada, and USA. Politecon Publications of Sydney, Australia, recently published one of the key works of modern Macedonian fiction, Petre M. Andreevski's novel *Pirey*, in a translation by Will Firth and Mirjana Simjanovska. Other such publishers include the Sydney-based Grigor Prichev Literary Society and the Brothers Miladinov Literary Society of Toronto, Canada.

These unequal translation patterns are clearly evidenced on a global scale in the economic indicators related to the global publishing business: they point to a significant trade imbalance between the US and UK publishing industry and their foreign counterparts, especially those from small countries. This leads to serious ramifications for the translation publishing industry in developing countries: these are not only economic, but also cultural. Domestic publishers tend to invest much more in US and UK bestsellers because they are more profitable than domestic literary works, which have lower visibility and need increased promotion and marketing to reach a large audience. As a result, the domestic language, literature and publishing industry are limited in their

development. We must also consider the genre of literary works translated: for in Macedonia, as well as globally, we are witnessing the fact that English-language books selected for translation tend to be in the popular genres like the romance and the thriller. The readers these translations produce are commercialized and heavily Westernized readers unconcerned with domestic cultures.

Moreover, by utilising a domesticating translation strategy based on fluidity and transparency, they serve to promote the values of the target culture. Domesticating translations tend to minimise cultural and linguistic differences; thus they “invisibly inscribe foreign texts with English language values and provide readers with the narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in a cultural other” (Venuti, 1995: 15).

Another paradigmatic example is at the practice of translation in the multilingual and multicultural context of the European Union. The EU Directorate General for Translation is the largest service in the Commission, as well as the largest public language service in the world, operating at two levels: for internal and external purposes. All communication with the public (citizens, national governments and administrations, courts, enterprises, other institutions etc.) is performed in any of the 23 official languages as required for the purpose, and pieces of legislation and documents of major public importance are published and communicated in all 23 official languages.

According to data from DG Translation, in 2005 they translated roughly 120,000 pages of *incoming* documents, whereas the number of *outgoing* translations amounted to about 1.2 million pages. This is due to the fact that the Commission operates *internally* in three *procedural* languages (French, German and English), of which two (French and English) are called *vehicular and drafting* languages. Namely, meetings are held and documents are published in one of the two vehicular languages or in both. Furthermore, all Commission officials are expected to be able to work in these two languages or learn to do so as soon as they arrive.

As analysts of this field are pointing out, despite its declared policy of democratic multilingualism, the European Union is witnessing the emergence of 'European English', as a kind of Eurolect or Eurojargon devised to meet the communicative needs of the EU member states. (Snell-Hornby, 1999: 107)

The role of the translator

Translation has a unique role to play in intercultural communication in that it ideally presents a target culture with an image of a source culture, with the ultimate goal of achieving mutual understanding and recognition, through developed awareness and embracing of differences. On the other hand, cultures may also use translations to represent and (re)define themselves vis-a-vis 'others', i.e. delimit themselves by focusing on that which distinguishes them from other cultures.

As Mary Snell-Hornby, points out, today's translators (and interpreters) must be experts not just in interlingual but also in intercultural communication, possessing the necessary professional expertise (linguistic, cultural and subject-area competence), and equipped with suitable technological skills: "On the basis of source material presented in written, spoken or multi-medial form, and using suitable translation strategies and the necessary work tools, they are able to produce a written, spoken or multi-medial text which fulfils its clearly defined purpose in another language or culture. Translators are engaged in fields ranging from scientific and literary translation over technical writing and pre- and post-editing to translation for stage and screen." (Snell-Hornby, 1999:117)

According to Snell-Hornby, the necessity for speedy processing brought about by globalisation and the accompanying tolerance of less than impeccable language forms, along with the levelling of culture-specific differences within the technological 'cultura franca', open up a potentially greater role for machine translations. However, in the area of intercultural communication, which requires not only language mediation but a high degree of cultural expertise as well, the human translator (and interpreter) will continue to play

an increasingly important role, taking the full responsibility for the 'final product'.

Conclusion

With their focus on the increasing opportunities and capacity for instant communication worldwide, many accounts of globalisation are ignoring what are in fact the necessary preconditions for achieving it. This is making invisible and transparent the increasingly important role played by translation in the production and circulation of global information, leading to the highly dubious assumption that information can circulate unaltered across different linguistic communities and cultures.

Translation is a key infrastructure of globalisation, the analysis of which can lend valuable insight into the dynamic interplay between the global and the local on a concrete, material level. In particular, it allows us to chart out the complex and numerous ways in which cultural difference is negotiated under globalisation, and how the present trends towards cultural homogenisation and Anglo-American hegemony are mediated at the local level through strategies of domestication and hybridisation. If globalisation is to live up to its true potential, it must allow greater room for smaller cultures and their cultural production, including increasing the number of translations from other languages into English.

In the EU, linguistic diversity is institutionalized and promoted, but if current debates about the high costs for translation within the EU institutions are any indication, there are initiatives to select only few official languages, and abandon the practice of having the language of each member state as official, in the name of efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The implications of this for smaller member countries should be further analysed.

Translation Studies tend to be strong in smaller cultures where translation necessarily plays a significant role (examples include Belgium, Holland, Israel, Finland, Catalonia, Galicia, Quebec). This should become the case in Macedonia as well. At the moment this academic discipline is generally part of

the translator-training institutions which operate within the national education system. However, translation studies should not be treated solely as a tool for instruction in translation and/or interpreting or occasionally as an application of literary studies; experts from other disciplines in the area of critical and cultural studies should also approach translation as an object of study.

Bibliography

1. Cronin, Michael. 2003. *Translation and Globalization*, London: Routledge.
2. Giddens, Anthony. 1990. *Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
3. Karl-Johan Lönnroth. "Translation Practices in the Commission", Director General for Translation, European Commission, CICEB Conference, Committee of the Regions - 21 September 2006.
4. Mander, Jerry and Edvard Goldsmith. 1996. *The Case Against the Global Economy for a Turn Towards the Local*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
5. Pym, Anthony. 2003. *Globalization and the Politics of Translation Studies*. Translation and Globalization Conference, Halifax, Canada, 29 May 2003.
6. Snell-Hornby, Mary. 1999. "Communicating the Global Village: On Language, Translation and Cultural Identity". *Current Issues in Language and Society* Vol 6, no. 2.
7. Venuti, Lawrence. 1995. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London: Routledge.
8. ---. 1998. *The Scandals of Translation: towards an ethics of difference*. London: Routledge.
9. Schaeffner, Christina. 2000. *Translation in the Global Village*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
10. Seraphinoff, Michael. 2007. "A Survey of Macedonian Literature in English Translation"
10. Waters, Malcolm. 1995. *Globalization*. London: Routledge.