

## Globalisation and Translation

### A discussion of the effect of globalisation on today's translation

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The objective of an article I published in September 2003 in *De Linguaan*, a magazine for members of the Netherlands Society of Translators and Interpreters, was to clarify my statement that, because of the current trend of globalisation, the translator no longer has the absolute need to always find a translation of a term in the target language if this would make the target-language text lose credibility. This is what I have called *excessive translation*. An excessive translation is a translation that fails to foreignise/exoticise, i.e., use source-language terms in the target-language text, to the degree that I believe is now acceptable. As an example I would like to refer to translations of Mexican food names. There are several options to translate a word like *mole*; instead of finding words in the target language (an explanatory translation like *a spicy sauce on a chocolate basis*), I recommend using the Spanish word (this is done in both the Dutch and English translations of Arràncame La Vida by Angeles Mastretta [De Pijn van de Liefde/Tear This Heart Out]). In the Dutch translation of the same work, the word "gorda" is translated as *blauwe maispannekoek* (blue corn pancake). This is what I consider an excessive translation.

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I intend to explain that target-language terms can be enlightening to the reader in that they reflect source cultures in a more genuine and correct manner. Two further examples of translations of Mexican texts into English and Dutch will be used\* to show that the practice of literary translation has changed as a result of globalisation, that texts have become more exotic, and that these translations thus contribute to a better and more correct understanding of the source culture.

I want to focus on the link between globalisation and translation, for the following reasons:

- globalisation has had an enormous impact on our lives and cultures;
- globalisation has had an enormous impact on translators' lives and work;.

- translation is becoming a more and more important tool to enhance understanding between cultures;

- cultures that readers are traditionally not familiar with have become more familiar as a result of globalisation;

- the practice of foreignising or exoticizing translation has changed as a result of globalisation.

Dictionary.com defines "Globalisation" as follows:

"To make global or worldwide in scope or application."

In this context (translation studies), I would change the above definition:

"To make source texts global or worldwide in understanding or application, where application refers to the teaching and/ learning about different cultures."

I have chosen to work with the translation of Mexican literature, because:

- Mexican literature is not well-known in the Netherlands or the UK.
- Mexican culture is slowly becoming better-known because of globalisation (e.g. through feature films).
- The source and target cultures are so different that translators face a considerable challenge in enabling readers to understand the source culture.
- In translation studies, there is too often a focus on known dominant cultures, such as the Anglo-Saxon culture, and as a result, studies are dedicated to analysing western languages.
- Globalisation has made it possible to include lesser known cultures and languages such as the Mexican culture and the Mexican variant of the Spanish language.

Translating Mexican literature, and Mexicanisms in particular, into Dutch and English (my field of specialization) is not an easy thing to do, as our cultures are so different. I intend to explain that future translations need to be as foreignising as possible within the limits of reasonable acceptability, so that Mexican literature can find a more prominent place on our bookshelves. As you will see below, there has been a relatively new trend wherein culturally bound elements (some, one might say, untranslatable), are not translated. I believe that this trend contributes to learning and understanding foreign cultures. Context explains culture, and adopting (not necessarily adapting) a selection of words enriches the target text, makes it more exotic and thus more interesting for those who want to learn more about the culture in question. Eventually, these new words may find their way into Dutch and/ or English dictionaries. We translators will then have contributed to enriching our own languages with loan words.

Globalisation has always been an important aspect of translation. Translation brings cultures closer. At present, the process of globalisation is moving faster than ever before and there is no indication that it will stall any time soon. Therefore, it has now become possible now, in this case, to keep (more) Mexican cultural elements in target texts. In each translation there will be a certain *distortion between cultures* (Pym). The translator will have to defend the choices he/she makes, but there is currently an option for including more foreign words in target texts.

A translator has three options for the translation of Mexicanisms:

- a. Adopting the foreign word without any explanation (see *Tear This Heart Out*).
- b. Adopting the foreign word with extensive explanations (see *Het Ravijn*, the Dutch translation of *Los de Abajo* by Mariano Azuela).
- c. Rewriting the text to make it more comprehensible to the target-language audience (see the title *Mexicaanse Tango* [Mexican Tango], the Dutch translation of *Arráncame La Vida* [literally: Tear My Life Out] by Angeles Mastretta).

I have tried to explain that adopting Spanish/ Mexican words in a target text is now a viable option for translators. Take a look at, for example, Sayers-Peden's translation of *Arráncame La Vida*, called *Tear This Heart Out*. This is an excellent, contemporary translation in that it contains many untranslated Spanish words. On practically each page of the English text one can find Spanish words without any explanation in the text or in a footnote. Cultures are getting closer and closer and this is something that I believe translators need to take into account. Of course it is also possible to defend any other option, because in the end it all depends on what the translator, or more often, the publisher wants to achieve with a certain translation. I would go for option a) above, because:

- a. the text reads more fluently (no stops)
- b. the text remains more exotic, more foreign
- c. the translator is closer to the source culture
- d. the reader of the target texts gets a more genuine image of the source culture
- e. the target text is more correct
- f. globalisation has made this option possible and more acceptable

What has been written about translation and globalisation and how does this link with my statement that the practice of translation has changed over the last few decades? To what extent do translators need to take globalisation into consideration in their practice?

## The Internet and books:

Whenever you look for information on translation and globalisation on the Internet, most of the links that appear as a result of a search refer to business translation. Very little has actually been published in the literature about translation studies and globalisation, which is of course highly overdue. This is understandable in that globalisation is generally used in a business context, but it is desirable to look at globalisation from different perspectives. Yes, the English language is usually associated with globalisation, but I believe that other languages have also benefited from globalisation, in that literatures of other cultures and languages have found a wider audience. This is an aspect that has not been thoroughly discussed in the field of translation studies; hence my attempt to start fresh discussion on the link between translation and globalisation. Eventually, my objective is that when searching for "translation globalisation" in yahoo.com or google.com, the surfer will not only find translation companies, but also studies on both fields.

Very little has actually been published in the literature that is about available on globalisation and translation studies very little has actually been published. One can only find a number of paragraphs on the link between translation, especially literary translation, and globalisation (Handbuch Translation<sup>1</sup>). I am placing special emphasis on literary translation in a global context, because that is the field of translation that is mostly overlooked. It is mentioned in the following review: <http://www.linguistlist.org/issues/11/11-2325.html#1>); The translator's new role is explained, which is the one of

*an expert for intercultural communication in an internationalised world*

Telecommunications, subtitling, business translation, and the EU get plenty of attention, but the focus is on English being a global language. Translation is said to have become obsolete. I can only accept that to a certain extent, of course. Literary translation from lesser-known cultures is hardly considered as being affected by globalisation. Therefore, this is still an enormous field of opportunity. There is so much more for translators and writers and readers to explore and share. In our globalised world, translation is the key to understanding and learning foreign cultures.

Unfortunately, when literary translation is at all discussed on the Internet, usually only the different variants of English and translations to and from these variants are mentioned. Very little space is dedicated to other languages, including relatively important languages, let alone a local variant such as Mexican Spanish.

I would like to comment on a few references to globalisation in *Handbuch Translation* and *The Translation Studies Reader*.<sup>2</sup> In *The Translation Studies Reader* there's only one reference to translation and globalisation (page 333). This reference is made in the introduction to articles written in the 1990s. It links globalisation to literary translation and cultural theory.

In the *Handbuch Translation* the following comments are made with reference to globalisation:

Globalisation is linked to English being a lingua franca; the language is said to be used at conferences (interpreting) and seen as the main language in the new technologies. The use of English as a global language is an important trend in world communication. Globalisation is also linked to the field of Translation Studies and how it has become more independent in the 80s as a result of globalisation; furthermore, on page 73, globalisation is placed in the context of changes in economics, science, technology, and society. On page 183 it says that globalisation and technology are very helpful to translators in that translators have more access to online information, such as dictionaries of lesser-known languages. To my mind, such comments can be extended to the readers of translations. Should the target text be challenging for a reader, the Internet can help him understand foreign elements in the text. Thus the text can be written in a more foreignising/exoticising manner. Although there is hardly any mention of literary translation in the book, I believe it can be implied that the above comments also apply to this particular field.

On page 238, the link between globalisation and translation in the field of advertising is discussed. Again, it has to do with business and economics. On page 250, the link between globalisation and literature is mentioned. Nothing new is said about possible changes in literary translation. It does mention the importance of translation in world literature and the concept of target-oriented translation, which, to my mind, will play a greater role in the future of translation. The book also discusses proper names: names are generally not translated when we translate between similar languages. This will not have any influence on my work however, as I focus on Spanish, English and Dutch. Names of people and places do not have to be changed, unless the translation lacks clarity (e.g. the Dutch translation of *México* in *Het Ravijn/Los de Abajo/The Underdogs* is Mexico, which is incorrect, because the author (Mariano Azuela) actually refers to Mexico City.

Anthony Pym wrote the following in *Translation and Text Transfer: An Essay on the Principles of Intercultural Communication* (1992):

If texts can be said to belong to certain people or certain situations, then transfer away from these people and situations must change the nature of the belonging, gradually turning degrees of familiarity into degrees of foreignness.<sup>3</sup>

For the purpose of clarity, I would like to add cultures to the above quote: people, cultures, or situations. If transfer, i.e., translation changes the contents of the text from familiarity to foreignness, then the new approach in translation (keeping more foreign elements in the target text) may be a solution to avoid that, especially because globalisation decreases the element of foreignness: a text no longer becomes more foreign or less familiar by introducing foreign words in a target text. In a modern global context we can bringtake more and more foreign elements into a target text,

and thus keep more of the source text in the translation, i.e., create a target text that is less foreign to the source culture. As we will see in the table below, this has been a practice in the translation of contemporary Mexican literature. More elements of the source culture are preserved in the target text, thus making a transfer that is more authentic and less foreign to members of the source culture.

I would like to illustrate the changes in translation and possible future changes with a comparison between translations of *Los de Abajo*. Here are some numbers:

Year (Language)	1963 (English)	1979 (Dutch)	2002 (English)
Total number of <i>different</i> Spanish words in the target text	24 <sup>4</sup>	31	24
Total number of Spanish words in the target text	45	197	204

The main difference that we can notice in the analysis of the translations of this text is that the number of words that have been translated is more or less the same, but the frequency of Spanish words has increased enormously. Unfortunately, there is no older or updated Dutch translation of the text, but by looking at the English translations only (published 39 years apart) we can see that Spanish words have become an essential part of the English text. An example of one of these words is *federal*, which has not been translated in the 2002 text, but was translated as *soldier* in 1963. As an expert of international communication, the translator of the 2002 text has chosen not to translate the word anywhere in the text, thus making the text more exotic and creating a more genuine, culturally convincing text for the reader of the translation.

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<sup>1</sup> Snell-Hornby, Mary. *Handbuch Translation*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translation Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fut.es/~apym/on-line/ttt/6.html>

<sup>4</sup> Words that are generally accepted in English, such as *Plaza*, have not been taken into account.