The Role(s) of Translation in the Dynamics of Multilingualism

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Translation as Cinderella?

- Translation is indispensable but neglected:
  - other issues (L2 teaching/learning, LHR, multilingual interaction, *lingue francophone*, etc.) take centre stage
  - translation has famous advocates (e.g. Steiner, Eco), and there are some encouraging changes in politicians’ perceptions of translation
  - but it still often confined to an ancillary role
  - This situation fails to do justice to the true import of language services: this constitutes the *first argument* of this paper

- Why is it so?
  - The issues at hand are complex ⇒ need for fundamental analysis
  - But there is a co-responsibility of the professions themselves, who need to reconsider the meaning of translation (and interpretation, or “T&I”)
  - All this carries implications for the training of language professionals: this constitutes the *second argument* in this paper

- These arguments converge with recent work commissioned or carried out by the DGT.
Getting started

- The core goal of this paper is to **explore the mutual relationships** between:
  
  a. Language dynamics (≈"dynamics of multilingualism")
  
  b. Language policy (by national states, IOs, SNOs, local authorities)
  
  c. Translation

- However, these are surprisingly little-explored issues
  
  - Existing research: “a”, “b” and “c”; some “a+b”; a little “b+c”; no “a+c”; no “a+b+c” at all
  
  - Hence, many questions remain open, and this talk is an opportunity for exchange & debate

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Four-part structure of this presentation

1. Translation in context: preliminary overview
2. Elements of macro-level, external language dynamics
3. Interconnections between the preceding two
4. Implications (i) policy involvement of the language professions; (ii) training for the language professions
Usual ("epistemological") anchoring of translation

Translation
History of T.
Models of T.
Theories of T.
Topical issues in T.
Specialised T.
etc.

LANGUAGE DISCIPLINES
But translation is often “on its own”

- No context $\Rightarrow$ No answers to the question “why translation?”, where “why” has two aspects: because of what *causes*? With what *consequences*?
- Some rare exceptions in translation studies (e.g. “polysystems theory”)
- This narrowness confines the translator to a *following* role
- Hence, translation has epistemological anchoring, but lives in phenomenological isolation
How relevant are these “context-less” approaches to translation?

- It is seems taken for granted that “there always has been a demand and there always will be”
- … really?
- In some contexts, the need for translation could be reduced through high-level, generalised L2 learning, e.g. “anti-multilingualism agendas”:
  - Example 1, in a 3-language case: 1 foreign language → generalised understanding between any pair of speakers
  - Example 2, in 23-language case: 1 lingua franca → generalised understanding in groups of any size
- Hence, some translation would no longer happen if the political/policy context changed...
- Much translation would disappear if “anti-multilingualism” voices have their way...
Anti-multilingualism voices/decisions

- Academics (various disciplines), e.g. Abram de Swaan claiming that “multilingualism is a bloody nuisance” (http://euobserver.com/879/26742), Daniele Archibugi, Amitai Etzioni, Philippe van Parijs...
- Media: The Economist; Financial Times; WSJ
- Usual arguments: efficiency and/or fairness
- These arguments can be countered, but with relatively involved analysis ( [1] → “value of multilingualism”; [2] need to “anchor” translation in a model of multilingualism)
- Note: the risk is not a GIVEN language (English or other); the risk is uniformity
1/ Translation depends on multilingualism

- Intellectual activity
- Social practice
- Source of income

SOCIAL / ECONOMIC / POLITICAL / CULTURAL / TECHNOLOGICAL / ETC. FACTORS

MULTILINGUALISM

TRANSLATION
2/ Introducing language policy
3/ Translation as a contributor to change

SOCIAL / ECONOMIC / POLITICAL / CULTURAL / TECHNOLOGICAL / ETC. FACTORS

MULTILINGUALISM

LANGUAGE POLICY

TRANSLATION
Two types of language dynamics

- **Internal language dynamics**
  - Evolution of morphosyntax, phonology over time
  - Owing to a variety of factors
  - Periods of rapid vs. slow change
  - Not all languages undergo the same rate of change
  - Beware of “folk linguistics” and “language myths”: even *supposedly* slow-changing languages (like French and Icelandic) are not static (example: read Jules Verne!)

- **External language dynamics**: languages expand, contract, and sometimes become extinct...
La langue bo s’est éteinte

OCÉAN INDIEN. Le dernier membre d’une tribu des îles Andaman appartenant à l’une des plus vieilles cultures du monde vient de mourir, a annoncé la semaine dernière l’ONG Survival International. Agée de 85 ans environ, Boa Sr était la dernière personne à parler le bo, une des dix langues des Grands Andamans. On estime généralement que la tribu des Bo vivait depuis soixante-cinq mille ans dans ces îles. Avant 1858, leur population s’élevait à 5000 personnes.
About external language dynamics

- They examine the position of languages *vis-à-vis one another* (thus dynamics of languages $\equiv$ dynamics of multilingualism)

- Many cases of decline, maintenance, revival and spread are well-identified for different types of languages:
  - European RMLs (Gàidhlig, Cymraeg...)
  - Regional vehicular languages (Swahili, Hausa...)
  - LWCs (Spanish, French, Chinese, Russian); particular case of English

- “Dynamics”: not just a vague notion of “change” (>\textless; something “static”); implies a time path, in which variables at time $t$ are influenced by variables at time $t-1$ and influence variables at time $t+1$: formally, $V_t = f(V_{t-1})$
Models of language dynamics

- At this time, no full-fledged theory, whether in the language disciplins or in “language economics”
- But there are partial theories, e.g.:
  - ⇒ maintenance, shift are revival of RMLs
  - ⇒ emergence of a language of communication between two different language communities
  - ⇒ emergence of a hierarchy of languages
  - ⇒ language learning resulting from strategic interaction
- However, there are missing elements:
  - Often: role of language policy and planning (“LPP”)
  - Always: translation (there is only a handful of papers in the economics of translation, all of them focusing on literary translation)
We need towards an extended model of language dynamics

- It should explicitly feature LPP and translation (need to organise the analysis around a different “core” variable), such as...

- “Multilingualism” (for our purposes) in communication:

  « The fact that aggregate communication in society, rather than taking place in one language only, takes place through several languages »

  [i.e. through a diversity of languages]
Operationalising the definition

- Communication → *effective utterances* (messages that are perceived by the receiver and by and large reach their goals [informatory, cooperative, strategic])
- Diversity = \( f \) (richness, evenness, distance)
  - *Richness*: # of languages
  - *Evenness*: distribution of languages (i.e., \( 0.25 \times 4 \) is more diverse than \( 0.01 \times 3 + 0.97 \))
  - *Distance*: difference between languages (more interlinguistic distance ⇒ more diversity; but not politically meaningful)
- Only “richness” and “evenness” are truly relevant to multilingualism ⇒ definition of a “diversity score” \( D \) based on the language(s) used in all effective utterances in a given setting
- Example: *all internal written communication in an organisation* (working documents, administrative circulars, e-mails, signage on the premises, etc.)
- ... ultimately, what needs to be computed is whatever is considered relevant for characterising a *linguistic environment*
Fitting language services into this framework

- Translation (and interpretation) exist because of linguistic diversity; more linguistic diversity implies a higher value of $D$; this, in turn, means more need/demand for language services.

- The demand for language services is particularly sensitive to components of multilingualism that depend, in turn, on language policy (‘LPP’).
There exist relatively “LPP-immune” language services, such as:

- Foreign sales of consumer goods w/o language specific content (or sales in other language region of multilingual countries): language services for labelling, advertising, localisation.

- Language-specific goods, in particular cultural goods: literary translation, dubbing & subtitling

- *But*...
LPP remains a determining force in the demand for language services [A]

1. Much professional translation and interpretation takes place in the public sector (national, local, but also IOs and SNOs): *directly dependent upon decision to have 1, 3, 6,... 23 official languages!*

2. Some of the translation work produced for the private sector (e.g. companies) results from public policies (e.g. legislation on the labelling of goods, product composition, safety instructions; languages in the a-v media, etc.)
LPP remains a determining force in the demand for language services [B]

3. Even supposedly “immune” sectors like literary translation are often dependent on state subsidies, which in turn depend on a LPP decision to support diversity (through translation)

4. Ultimately, all services in multilingual communication depend on multilingualism, and multilingualism is largely dependent on LPPs to that effect

Note: these policies do not necessarily reflect a fondness of multilingualism/diversity itself; they may serve other needs THROUGH multilingualism, e.g. “democratic participation”, “fairness”, “appropriate treatment of cultural identities”, etc.
Language services also help *maintain* multilingualism

- People use a variety of languages because three conditions are present (cf. “P-TOP model” \(\rightarrow\) general language use – applicable to communication, ths determining the variable \(D\) presented above):
  - Capacity to use these languages;
  - Opportunities to use them;
  - Desire to use them

- Translation contributes to all three:
  - Develops capacity among users by disseminating words/terminology
  - Provides materials required to operate multilingually (\(\rightarrow\) Catalan *normalització*), increasing opportunities
  - Helps establish the social legitimacy of all target languages, and hence their desirability

- Added impact through language technologies:
  - They lower the cost of multilingualism in general
  - They increase the cost-effectiveness of translation as *one* strategy (in complementarity with others) for communication in multilingual settings.
Implications [P1]: support pro-diversity language learning!

- L2, L3 learning in general, because this is at the heart of a *multilingual ethos*, but:
  - support in particular “PAL”-based approaches, where PAL=“personal adoptive language”; see *Un défi salutaire* (“Maalouf Report” to Commissioner for Multilingualism)
  - beware of “1+>2 model” (unstable)
- L2, L3 etc. skills do not threaten translation, because:
  - It does not replace professional quality wherever the latter is required (and LPP, among other things, defines many contexts where professional quality *is* required!)
  - T&I still often required by users for reasons of comfort
  - There is frequent preference of receiving information, services, etc. in one’s L1, *even among fluent bilinguals* (e.g. studies on Catalonia, Quebec).
Implications [P2]: support intercomprehension!

- “Intercompréhension” (IC) among related languages = Receptive competence (in related languages)
- Longstanding history of support by the EU (EuRom4 project, now EuRom5 for Romance languages; equivalents for Germanic languages)
- IC helps to reintroduce multilingualism in contexts from which it could otherwise be excluded ⇒ contributes to multilingualism as a determinant of demand for language services
- Gives rise to new language services (ILA: “interactive language assistance”)
Implications [P3]: debunk language myths!

■ Common myth: “English as a lingua franca” [ELF], a.k.a. “globish”, “Euro-English” (Note again: the issue is NOT English per se, but any hegemonic language) ⇒ indirectly justifies a push towards using more so-called “ELF” ⇒ weakens multilingualism, because in fact “ELF” is not substantially different from English:
  ■ Manifestations of ELF are linguistically anecdotal
  ■ The concept of ELF is epistemologically wobbly
  ■ The use of ELF changes nothing to the serious social problems of efficiency and fairness posed by linguistic hegemony
Implications [T]: Broaden training of language professionals

- Language policy must be part of the curriculum of translators and interpreters
  - Language policy is literally *vital* for the language professions – it is particularly obvious for conference interpreting

- There are new types of work for translators
  - Diversification within the language industry (ref.: 2009 DGT study)
  - Multilingualism and globalisation imply the development of monitoring (“veille multilingue”) ⇒ need for associated skills (information selection and dissemination; capacity to synthesise problems and “navigate” issues between the generic and the specific) ⇒ increasing *autonomy* and *responsibility* of language professionals

- It is only reasonable to develop training accordingly

- ... summing up, these are exciting times to be a language professional
Merci – Danke – Grazie – Grazia !