

Translation in a Globalized World

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Globalization, with all the sweeping momentum it has, has been influencing almost all spheres of life. Translation could not distant itself from such an impact. Connected with this, both pro-globalists (optimists) and anti-globalists (pessimists) have had conflicting views on globalization-translation reciprocal relationship. Unipolar as our current time is, with “English” as its striking force, translation, nevertheless, still witnesses expansion and prosperity. It is now a basic means for bringing various nations together, bringing world literature within the hands of different nationalities, catering for media programs and movies industry, serving e-commerce and Internet non-English speakers, and serving international conglomerates, big ventures, and businesses. New concepts such as “localization” and “glocalization”, both related to translations into local languages, appeared recently. Translation will thus continue to play a significant role in the globalization arena.

Keywords: globalization, translation, culture, localization

Introduction

In a world dominated almost exclusively by incessant breakthroughs in science and technology, one can expect concomitant dramatic changes or adaptations in various spheres of life. Such technological advancements must have received a marked impetus following the two World Wars which cost humanity a great deal. Striving for economic stability, in particular, pushed superpowers to expand their trade (in its broadest sense) all over the world. The effect of such a move has not been restricted to the economy; it, rather, began to infiltrate into various life aspects including culture.

With the challenges and competitions witnessed in our world in the last two decades, the concept of “globalization” has become part and parcel of our life. Now we almost all feel that the world of today is shrinking: Connectivity among disparate nations is much closer, transportation turns to be quite easy, contacts through the Internet bring people together, and one can know much about other nations through the numerous satellite TV channels.

What Is Globalization?

Though common and familiar as it may, the term “globalization” seems rather complicated to define or identify explicitly. It has been looked at as “an attempt to abolish barriers, especially in trade, ... communication and cultural exchanges” with the aim of improving various nations (Jones, n.d.). Newmark (2003) maintained that globalization is “the process (which enables) financial and investment markets to operate internationally, largely as a result of continuously improved and intensified communication”. For Sixton (2006), it is a “transcendent phenomenon” that has left its imprint on the “very values and mores of

people". Globalization has also promoted "connectivity and interdependence" of international businesses. This has especially been enhanced by "advances in telecommunications infrastructure and the rise of the Internet" (Retrieved from www.investwords.com).

Globalization can thus be looked at as an act with international orientation to reach markets in different parts of the world. Cultural integration is a natural consequence of such a move that helps to bring peoples of different nationalities together. Tools of globalization such as the Internet, TV satellite stations, the cell phones, and modern means of transportation all contribute to make global communication easier and smoother.

Translation Status

In a world, where globalization seeks to reach every corner of our life, and where the world turns almost into a small village, translation seems, apparently, in a very perplexed and entangled situation. What status may translation have where cultural diversity is targeted, a dominant language (English) is fostered, and national borders are trespassed? While globalization proponents seem quite optimistic thinking that translation at present would surely witness an unprecedented boom, anti-globalists opt for a pessimistic perspective noting that translation would rather fade away with time as the need for it would diminish with the ascendancy of English. In this respect, Mihailas, in an article entitled "Translation as a Globalization Tool" (2008) noted that translation plays a vital role in the globalization process, enabling businesses in their broad sense "to go worldwide more easily, people to speak different languages while travelling, meeting and talking over the Internet or face to face".

While various nations head ardently towards globalization, one might expect that these nations would ultimately lose their identities as a direct impact of globalization movement as barriers are expected to be smashed and nations to be homogenized. On the other hand, and where "unipolarity" seeks to predominate worldwide, translation may seem at stake. Surprisingly, translation is, conversely, flourishing these days. It is still a key means in bringing diverse cultures together "in order to create the cultural network, the cultural globalization some people agree to while some others run away from" (Han, 2008). It also stimulates communication, interaction, and mutual understanding. It copes with the rapidly-developing world through publicizing and promoting commodities, concepts, and media programs. Furthermore, it can have a national role, as Humboldt has pointed out, taking "faithfulness of translation (as) a patriotic value" (Buden, 2006). However, there are some fears and premonitions that "Western ideals of capitalism" would pervade worldwide, threatening as such the values, norms, walks of life, etc., of people of other cultures. This should have been enhanced by the accelerated advancements in the TV growing satellite stations, movies industry, etc. (Adewuni, 2005). The expanding application of the Internet for various purposes, especially e-commerce, together with the marked "increase in non-English speaking web users" (House, 2009, p. 80) must have reinforced the need for translators worldwide. There is also a pressing demand on translators in various sectors due to the dire need to render materials both quickly and precisely to other languages, an "evidence of a language's ability to function in the modern world and thus remain an important source of symbolic identification" (Baker & Saldanha, 1998, p. 127).

Commenting on the significance of translation, Michael Cronin, in his book *Translation and Globalization* (2003) asserted that "communities (without translation) remained partitioned and shut up in their own mental worlds and proximity will breed alienation and violent conflicts" (as cited in Hermas, 2009, p. 104). Notwithstanding this, local identity cannot be sacrificed at a time where globalization tries to

impose a unilateral culture. Artistic forms including paintings, music, and literature (especially poetry) are lucid examples in this respect as they trespass borders and appeal to emotions, passions, and feelings irrespective of nationalities.

Another important contribution of translation to world civilization is to acquaint peoples of different nationalities of famous creative literary men such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Tolstoy, Hemingway, Lawrence, and Tagore, to name only a few examples. Filmmaking shows how translation has bolstered globalization; through subtitling and dubbing, movies' fans, everywhere in the world, know much about movie stars and filmmakers (Hollywood, for example) who have "achieved international acclaim" (Sixton, 2006); how the movies industry is so influential is reflected in how "many stereotypes slip into our everyday life" (Martinez-Sierra, 2009). Cintas (as cited in Martinez-Sierra, 2009) maintained that this could well lead to "cultural colonization". The last two decades, in particular, witnessed the appearance of "activist communities of translators such as 'Translators for Peace'" (House, 2009, p. 74) whose main aim has been to foster relations among various cultures, together with the "burgeoning of interest in *community interpreting*" (Baker & Saldanha, 1998, p. 128). Besides that, translation assumes a special importance for the political sector as translators are always needed (written, consecutive, simultaneous, and whispering) to accompany delegations, help in negotiations and talks, and provide translation services for world outstanding institutions.

Globalization vs. Translation: Mutual Reciprocity

As permeating other countries (other cultures) has become a target for international conglomerates and businesses, translation consequently has been prospering these days because not all people other than English can speak this language. Translation as such has become an indispensable tool for globalization (a cultural connector). Growing businesses, on their part, seek the help of "professional translation (companies) in order to branch into foreign markets" (Retrieved from www.7brands.com). It is also well expected that the number of buyers online would increase a great deal (10 times in 2010) in case websites are run in their native languages (ibid). Besides, it is expected as well that the number of "inter-governmental and international non-governmental organizations" which work in a "multilingual world" would increase considerably (Baker & Saldanha, 1998, p. 127). The translation industry is therefore in tremendous demand to cope with the ever-growing global manifold activities.

The translation process, deeply influenced by the rapid development of globalization, has undergone constant advancement. Nowadays, translators can be hired through the Internet. Translation companies or agencies advertise their activities online. Even translation job opportunities are increasingly found on the Internet. Moreover, translation societies and associations grow in number in many developed countries. Nevertheless, "the impact of the globalization movement and the growth of the Internet has been a boon for the translation industry"; yet, increasing numbers of incompetent translators have infiltrated into this profession due to increasing demand (Sixton, 2006). Such a thriving industry is still looked at as a buffer against the predominance of one language (English), and also as an important tool to preserve "linguistic and cultural diversity" (House, 2009, p. 79).

The dramatic progresses in mass media, due to globalization, propped up the important position of translation. Media translators nowadays face a huge "material meant for immediate consumption" within a very short time, as in translating TV events. For example, the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) "broadcasts in over 40 different languages and needs large numbers of translators" (House, 2009, p. 79). Other TV satellite

stations, on the increase, follow suit. Also, the markedly increasing numbers of non-English-speaking Internet users, who prefer to use their native languages, promote the need for translation activities. Digital industries, e-commerce and e-learning require, among other options, more and more translators. Added to this, super multinational companies find themselves facing workers, technicians, security men, etc., from various nationalities while running their big businesses and ventures in new markets abroad. The need for translations into local languages becomes therefore a necessity as the “immediate access to information about a product in local languages will increase demand for ‘localized advertising’ campaigns” (House, 2009, p. 80).

As means of communication have considerably been expanding under the impact of globalization, translation has thus become a pillar in this respect these days. Translation, as is observed, is still badly needed to bring different peoples and cultures together, attempting all through to bridge any gaps. As such, and because of the pressure of time, translators are required to translate texts so quickly especially those working in tourist companies, offices, and centers. TV satellite stations and Internet services also entail prompt undertaking. Qualitative qualification of translators becomes therefore a necessity. Yet, translation can be geared for specific purposes. Commenting on this point, Sixton (2006) pointed out that:

Globalization is an attempt to inculcate the prevailing ideology of consumer capitalism, dominated by Western English-speaking countries and corporations. The net effect is that translation has become a tool of the dominant ideology, used in the methodology of negotiating for authority and power and reconstructing reality in an attempt to naturalize its own reconstituted cultural superiority. (Retrieved from <http://voices.yahoo.com/globalization-translation-tool-extending-54305.html?cat=37>)

Besides that, “translation cannot be separated from power relations, social setting, political context, and cultural paradigms” (SUN, 2009).

As contacts among various countries have become much easier than before due to “falling trade barriers”, globalization is promoted and consolidated these days because of the concurrently “falling linguistic and cultural barriers” (SUN, 2009). Yet, translation may block up globalization movement when it “functions as a cultural filter to impede the otherwise directness of cross-cultural communication through suppression and appropriation, causing a virtual blockage to cultural understanding, intended or otherwise” (ibid). This last point, however, questions one of translation’s outstanding qualities, namely “faithfulness” as it presupposes that translation, in a world dominated by ideologies and interests, could be oriented towards achieving specific objectives. It is believed then that relative cultural protectionism is needed while practicing and encouraging translation. One may cite here the Chinese example in this context. This country used to live isolated and withdrawn for a long time, then it moved into an era of “openness” benefitting from other superpowers’ expertise without sacrificing its local identity.

Within the conflicting views on the reciprocal relationship between globalization and translation, one can detect rather inflexible, or even extreme, notions. Globalization, for instance, is looked at as a “death trap for translation” aiming at making “translators redundant” by ascribing uniformity to the “language and culture of the global village” (Adewuni, 2005); Brooks (as cited in Adewuni, 2005) asserted that globalization seeks to “(weaken) or rather (attempt) to kill other cultures and languages...”; Monshipouri (as cited in Adewuni, 2005) argued that the globalization process entails losing “some part or all of one’s (national) identity...”; Seabrook (as cited in Adewuni, 2005) looked into globalization as “a declaration of war upon other cultures...”; Newmark (2003), on the other hand, noted that: “The essence of translation is completely unaffected by globalization, but since globalization’s instrument is the promotion of increasingly rapid and never flagging

technological changes, the modes and channels of translation do thereby multiply, change, and indeed sometimes disappear” (Retrieved from [www.http://zif.spz.tu-Darmstadt.de/jg-08-2-3/beitrag/Newmark1.htm](http://zif.spz.tu-Darmstadt.de/jg-08-2-3/beitrag/Newmark1.htm)).

As the propositions of both proponents and opponents of globalization abound these days, people at large have been looking with suspicion, fear, anxiety, and circumspection into globalization. In our world these days, pressure groups such as intelligentsia, academics, and others, express serious concern about this new move which could threaten national identities. This is especially true for the business sector products (medical, electrical, food, fabrics, etc.) as there is an expanding inclination these days to cater for the linguistic and cultural needs of the foreign markets.

Be that as it may, the term “localization” appeared and turned to be in vogue thereafter. Localizing products nowadays simply means translating specifications and applications into various languages to secure better understanding. A process like this should involve recruiting translators of different nationalities. Besides, “the immediate access to information about a product in local languages will increase demand for that product” (House, 2009, p. 80).

Connected with this, the steady inflow of globalization has not always been met with welcoming attitudes; there appeared resistance and even hostility against it. It has been felt that local cultures, at large, are threatened to an extent. The term “localization”, thus, received an impetus “in response to what is perceived as colonizing and postcolonial foreign incursions”, let alone its “devastating homogenizing effect”, and inclination to impose “stultifying sameness” (SUN, 2009).

Although the term “localization” is not yet materialized, it is generally “seen by (translation) industry as a superordinate term that encompasses translation”; it also involves “taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale... where it will be used and sold” (Monday, 2001, p. 191). Through localization, some adaptation has been made in the general orientation of the globalization movement. Pragmatically, it is felt that huge numbers of non-English speakers still cling to their native cultures including their mother tongues. Products of all types are therefore localized by transnational incorporations (i.e., translated into various languages) to ensure more profits. These incorporations and other businesses need to “translate (their) websites—or localize them—for the customers’ language(s), customs and currenc(ies)” (Retrieved from www.aaatranslation.com).

The interaction between globalization and localization has led to the emergence of a new concept—glocalization. One evident example of this phenomenon is the type of glocal “Englishes” used in some countries, namely India, Nigeria, Singapore, etc., as a result of translations from native languages into English (SUN, 2009).

Conclusions

In our technology- and science-oriented world, translation has become a big business. Prosperous and efficacious as it may, translation’s role with the dashing movement of globalization has been both indispensable and operative. The introduction of the Internet—a striking force of globalization—has been serving as a facilitator for promoting and circulating translation activities. In the midst of accelerated developments, some cultures still struggle to “immunize” themselves and safeguard their entities against globalization incursions. Yet, some super powers still exert their influence through mass media: the Voice of America radio networks (USA) and the BBC radio and TV network (UK) are still broadcasting in a large number of languages; they therefore need a lot of translators to undertake such a hard task (House, 2009, p. 79; Jones, n.d.).

Translation is recognized to work in two opposite directions: First, it caters for globalization movement through translation agencies especially spread in developed countries. Second, it strives to preserve “cultural cohabitation” (Buden, 2006) which stands in the face of unipolarity. Contrary to some pessimists who foretell a tragic end for translation due presumably to the predominance of globalization (Adewuni, 2005), optimists emphasize the pressing need for translation. To round off, “translation is an integral part of (globalization), and without it the global capitalist consumer-oriented economy would not have been possible” (House, 2009, p. 80).

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