

Characteristics of Speech Translation

with Special Reference to Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream*

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Abstract:

In this paper we investigate the genre-related constraints the translator of public speeches has to abide by as well as the specific techniques employed in order to maintain the genius of the source text and to produce a similar effect on target readers. To this purpose, we compare two Hungarian and one French translation of Martin Luther King's famous speech *I Have a Dream*. Generally, the translator of speeches has two options: either to render the ideology of the ST as faithfully as possible and thus to produce a more or less literal translation or to move away from the text and produce a free translation that reflects a biased point of view. In order to be appropriate, functional and acceptable in the source and target cultures, the speech and its translation have to conform to some rules related to the forms of address, stylistic-rhetorical devices and figures of speech.

Keywords: explicitation, addition, omission, literal and free translation.

Introduction

Speech translation has become an important field of translation studies in today's global world since international politics cannot dispense with it. In the European Parliament, for example, politicians are allowed to address their audience in their mother tongue and the speech is simultaneously translated into all the 22 official languages of the EU. Closely related to the study of speech translation is the discipline of rhetoric, which is being revalorized today due to its prominent place in communication studies and several professions (law, marketing, advertising, etc.). Therefore, in this paper we set out to investigate the characteristics of speech translation and analyze the techniques and translation solutions from word- up to text-level through translations of Martin Luther King's famous speech, *I Have a Dream*, which is

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considered a masterpiece of rhetoric. The paper is an inquiry into the different genre-related constraints the translator has to consider in the process of translation in order for the translation to produce a similar effect and to be acceptable in the target culture. To this purpose, we compare three different translations; the first target text is a Hungarian one (TT₁) and its author is unknown, the second one is again a Hungarian version (TT₂) carried out by Tibor Derdák and Anna Kiss and, finally, the third translation (TT₃) is into French.

In principle, the translator of any speech has two options: either to render the thoughts of the speaker or the ideology of the text, hence, the historical context as closely and as faithfully as possible and thus to produce a more or less literal translation reflecting fidelity to the ST and being neutral in tonality, or to move away from the ST and produce a free translation by, for example, cutting out parts and producing an abridged or adapted version of the original or even introducing a biased point of view into the text. In this respect, it can be stated from the outset that all three translations are source-text-oriented, reflecting preoccupation with the content as well as the form of the original.

The Nature of the Source Text

Starting with Cicero, Quintilian and Aristotle rhetoricians have always agreed that the role of rhetoric, hence, the goal of any speech is to persuade at all costs (Țiclea 12). Thus, from the point of view of translation theory, the speech is an appeal-focused text-type according to the typology of texts proposed by Katharina Reiss (2000) as it is written with an explicit purpose and it involves a non-linguistic result. In other words, there is a clear appeal to the hearer or reader of such texts and preserving this inherent appeal is essential in any speech translation. According to Reiss, the translator is allowed to depart more from the content and the form of the original than in other types of text. Since the main goal is to convince, the semantic component in speech translation has a lower degree of importance as compared to the emotive one, i.e. conveying the same emotiveness as the source text does. Aristotle (1982) highlighted the three means of effective persuasion: *ethos* (the character of the speaker and his or her moral integrity), *logos* (logical arguments) and *pathos* (stirring the emotions of the hearer). Out of these three elements the most challenging and difficult part the translator of speeches is

directly concerned with is rendering the *pathos* of the source text. The translator has to observe the connotative value of words, the culture-specific words, terms, plays on words and, most importantly, the rhetorical-stylistic devices that such texts abound in (rhetorical questions, repetitions, antitheses, metaphors, similes, hiperboles, etc.) and to find an adequate and creative formulation for them in the target text. Phonemic patterns (assonances and alliterations) leading to a melodic effect and rhythm, which contributes to the so-called incantatory effect of the text, must also be observed and accounted for by the careful translator. The incantatory effect of a speech, as defined by Quentell (8), "can be a mere repetition of a phrase or a clause, a repetition of an idea with different words or a repetition of a rhetoric pattern."

In order to minimize ambiguities in the target text and to keep up with the cogency of the source text the translator must also reproduce the parts of the speech: exordium or introduction, narration, digression, proposition, argumentation, refutation and peroration. Many of these parts contain recurrent lexical elements that have a fixed correspondent in all languages (forms of address, greeting, end formulas, imperatives, etc.).

Extra-textual Considerations in Speech Translation

Independently of whether the speech is interpreted simultaneously or it is translated in writing before or after its delivery there are a number of aspects the translator of speeches has to take into account.

First, the translator has to be documented beforehand with regard to the persona of the speaker as it leaves an imprint on the language used at the lexical, grammatical and stylistic level. He or she has to be familiar with the views of the speaker on the issues that he or she approaches in order to be able to draw correct inferences when meaning is only implied, not stated.

Second, the translator has to be sufficiently familiar with the subject matter of the speech if he or she is to produce a lexically adequate translation.

Third, the place where the speech is pronounced must not be overlooked either as it relates to the culture and characteristics of the country. Depending on its relevance to the speech or its

historical importance, the place can determine the tone of the speech (solemn, elevated, audacious, etc.) along with its subject matter.

Fourth, the translator has to be able to project the audience of the ST and the speaker's relationship with it. This is apparent in the forms of address, greeting, common idiomatic expressions, quotations, metaphors, etc.

Thus, the author of the public speech *I Have a Dream* is Martin Luther King, a black minister, civil rights activist and an advocate of non-violent protest who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for combating racial inequality in the 20th century America. Hence, his speech is calm, well-reasoned, conciliatory in tone but at the same time highly emotional and visionary. The references and vocabulary used belong to the semantic field of politics and patriotism on the one hand and religion and spirituality on the other.

The subject matter is black marginalisation and its abomination. The speech was produced in 1963, at a time when demonstrations started to degenerate into violence and even murder.

The speech was delivered on the steps of Lincoln Memorial in Washington, a setting consonant with the subject matter.

The audience was extremely diverse and huge consisting mostly of black people coming from different geographical regions and different educational backgrounds. There was also a national television audience. In fact, King wanted to address the whole nation.

Similarities and Differences in the Three Translations

The rhythm of the ST is preserved in all three translations so that there is a sentence-to-sentence correspondence between the original and its translations.

The ST uses an extremely loaded language that appeals to emotion and reason at the same time. Logic and emotion do not exclude each other in this speech but together contribute to its effectiveness. Neutral political and religious terms on the one hand and loaded words or phrases on the other co-occur in the text or within the same stylistic device (especially in metaphors). Thus, emotional language and objective language are juxtaposed and the degree of appropriateness of the outgoing translation ultimately depends on the translator's recognition of key terms and key figures of speech. Political key terms include: demonstration,

freedom, injustice, captivity, segregation, discrimination, democracy, racial justice, racial injustice, citizenship rights, persecution, oppression, racists, interposition, nullification. In this respect, TT₂ and TT₃ use a clearer, more outspoken type of language as compared to TT₁, which appeals to omission, as in the following example:

ST: "One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of *segregation* and the chains of *discrimination*."

TT₁: "Száz évvel később a négerek életét még mindig béklyóba verik a *faji megkülönböztetés* bilincsei és [ø] láncai."

TT₂: "Száz évvel később a fekete bőrű ember életét még mindig megbénítja az *elkülönítés* bilincse és a *megkülönböztetés* láncja."

TT₃: "Un siècle plus tard, la vie des Noirs reste entravée par la *ségrégation* et enchaînée par la *discrimination*."

Another technique of rendering the loadedness of the ST is to translate neutral, specialized terms (political terms) by choosing more general words that have negative connotations, are rather evaluative and express a value-judgement like the translation solution 'gáncsoskodik' ('to find fault with') for 'interposition' in TT₂:

ST: 'I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with words of "*interposition*" and "*nullification*" – one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.'

TT₂: "Van egy álmom, hogy egy nap Alabama, ahol most erőszakos rasszisták élnek, és ahol a kormányzó *gáncsoskodik* és *jogtiprást* fröcsög, épp ez az Alabama egy napon olyan hely lesz, ahol a fekete bőrű kisfiúk és kislányok megfoghatják a fehér bőrű kisfiúk és kislányok kezét, mintha testvérek lennének."

But not only objective language is important to be transferred in the case of speeches. Reproducing stylistic devices (emotive language) is not to be neglected either, as they are a

means of persuasion and play an important role in preserving the inherent appeal of the ST. More particularly, anaphoras enhance memory – which is not to be overlooked in the case of an oral genre like the speech – and confer emphasis to the rest of the sentence in which they appear:

ST: “Now is the time...”

TT₁: “Most jött el az ideje...”

TT₂: “Most van itt az idő...”

TT₃: “Il est temps...”

If repetitions are not reproduced in translation, the urging effect or the cadence of the original speech may be lost:

ST: “*Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.*”

TT₁: “Mindnyájan azzal a tudattal *menjetez vissza* Mississippibe, Alabamába, Dél-Karolinába, Georgiába, Louisianába, modern nagyvárosaink nyomornegyedeibe és gettóiba, hogy ez a helyzet valamiképp meg tud és meg fog változni.”

Speakers who address masses often appeal to reification when building up their metaphors and other figures of speech. Comparing the abstract with the concrete (thirst with the need for freedom, demand for justice with presenting a check to be paid) allows King to address a wide range of people and produce easy-to-understand and memorable images. Reification is more often valorized in TT₂ and TT₃ than in TT₁, where it is omitted:

ST: “Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.”

TT₂: “Ne akarjuk a szabadság iránti szomjúságunkat a keserűség és gyűlölet poharával csillapítani.”

TT₃: “Ne buvons pas de la coupe de l’amertume et de la haine pour assouvir notre soif.”

To achieve cohesion and emphasis, particularly in oral argumentative texts, marked word order is often favoured. In the example below inversion, which is common in spoken French, points to the translator’s concern to achieve equivalence not only at the level of the sentence but at textual level, too:

ST: “It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment.”

TT₃: “*Que la nation ne tienne pas compte de l’urgence du moment, qu’elle sous-estime la détermination des Noirs, lui serait fatal.*”

There are some discrepancies as to the forms of address in the three translations. TT₁ uses the informal second-person pronoun ‘veletek’ (‘with you’) along with other forms of address like ‘népemnek’, ‘fehér testvéreink’, ‘barátaim’, etc.

TT₂ inconsistently alternates the formal second-person pronoun ‘önökkel’ with the informal ‘veletek’, ‘enyémnek’, ‘fehér barátaink’, ‘barátaim’, etc. whereas in TT₃ ‘mon peuple’, ‘nos frères Blancs’ and ‘mes amis’ are used instead. In conclusion, TT₁ and TT₃ use the religious forms of address as frequently as the informal ones while TT₂ relies exclusively on the informal second-person pronoun. In other words, TT₁ and TT₃ portray King as a prophet or a preacher addressing his congregation, which is more effective since spiritual authority is undisputable.

Instances of improvement of the original text (translation gains) include punning. The translator of TT₂ built upon the different meanings of the Hungarian verb ‘jön’ (‘to come’) depending on the particle it is preceded by:

ST: “...for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny.”

TT₂: “*Eljöttek, mert rájöttek, hogy az ő szabadságuk kibogozhatatlanul összegubancolódott a mi szabadságunkkal.*”

There is also an instance of translation loss that involves all the three TTs. King's allusion to Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address apparent in the expression "Five score years ago" was lost on account of linguistic differences between the languages involved in the translation:

TT₁: "Száz évvel ezelőtt..."

TT₂: "Száz éve annak, hogy..."

TT₃: "Il y a cent ans..."

Conclusions

In all three translations sentences are kept short and simple in construction, the rhythm of the original having thus been retained. Since the speech is an argumentative text-type, the translator has to translate two types of languages: objective language and emotive language in order to preserve the appeal of the text. This may result in an improvement of the original text and in the translator being regarded as biased on account of her direct involvement in the TT and her preference for emotive overtones. In view of rendering loaded language in Hungarian translators often appeal to lexical particularization and punning whereas marked word order proves especially effective in French. In addition, the Hungarian translators of King's speech often translate neutral terms by more general words that are, however, emotively marked. As evidenced by the biblical forms of address, TT₁ and TT₃ can be termed to be more aware of the persona of the speaker than TT₂, that is, more conscious of King's double allegiance, to his nation and to God at the same time.

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