

# THE CONCEPT TRANSLATION : A SOCIO-CULTURAL PROBLEMATICS

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This paper is mainly devoted to suggest the introduction of a socio-cultural approach to language in translation in human and social sciences. More precisely , it attempts to examine one of the various possible connections between language and some aspects of a given society for translation purposes.

Both Anthropologists and Sociolinguists stress on the importance of looking at language as a set of socio-cultural practices , and speech , as one significant element of culture , maybe the interpretation of that culture ,i.e. language as a core cultural value of any nation is the key element used for cultural identification.

The human being , apparently , provides a structure to the social world - so that language plays an important role in the construction of a model of a world on the basis of a particular way of thinking .

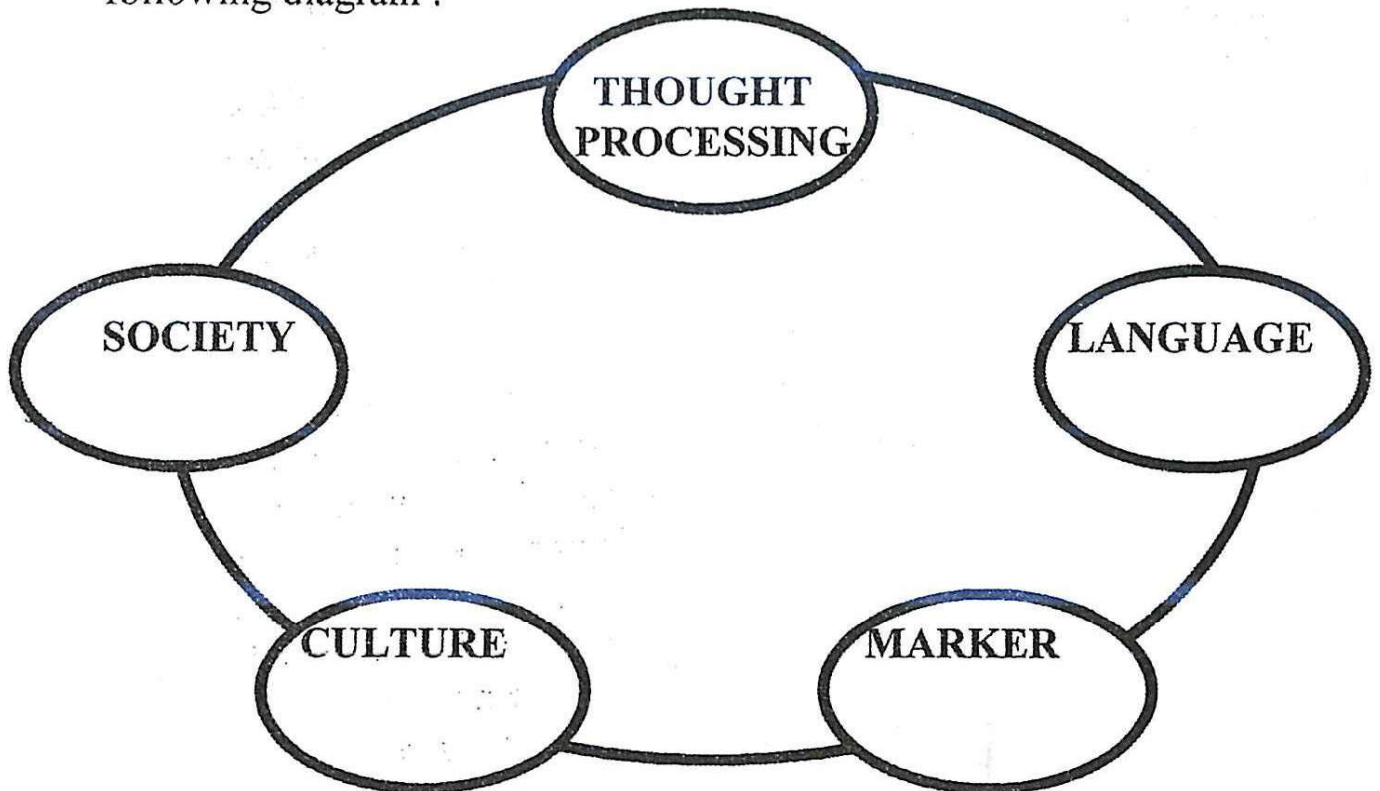
This is why , in fact , an examination of a kind of terminology would indicate , more or less, the social construction of reality according to a specific culture shaped in a specific language. It , therefore, reflects a certain interaction of the human being with the environment. Semantically speaking , a language structure refers to the way in which the vocabulary is organised to deal with the outside world. In this respect , Kramsch defines language as being :

*The principle means whereby we conduct our social lives when it is used in context of communication , it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways.*

( 1998 : 03 )

Though the concept of culture itself has been, for a long time , a matter of hot debates and discussions , criticised as an all - encompassing notion because of its vagueness and overloadedness , but recently speaking , the concept of culture reveals a new dimension used to express the state of intellectual development of a given society.

Further , it is of crucial importance to note at this level, that Sociolinguistics experiments have clearly shown , at a time , that a number of linguists get convinced that it is impossible for two languages to be sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. This in fact, may be well illustrated in the following diagram :



Therefore, the concept meaning for the translator is one of the hurdles to face while moving from the source language (S.L) to the target language (T.L) ,especially if the two languages are originally descendants of two different parent-language families .Among the

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different parameters, the translator should be aware of are ,first, those of :

- 1- Translatability or untranslatability of the concept, then, at which level he (the translator) is proceeding ,i.e. what senses and meanings a concept can have in the source language.
- 2- What it holds as socio-cultural values.
- 3- The existence or non-existence of the concept itself or its equivalent in the target language.
- 4- Moreover, the formality and informality of the context at hand in which the concept is found.

Practically speaking, there are a number of English words which have no corresponding equivalents neither in Arabic nor in French. The word ' Tea ' for instance, has got different meanings, especially if it is combined with other words. It denotatively expresses a hot drink, however, once compound with the word ' break ' , it means having a pause with or without tea, while when used with the word ' high ' giving birth to the word ' high-tea'. It expresses an invitation for a ceremony ; or when used in an utterance like : ' coming for tea ' it invites you for an evening meeting.

On the other hand, the word ' cafe ' displays various senses according to either its pronunciation or its context in which it is used. For example, the word 'café' likely pronounced /kafei/ refers for the British to a cheap place where they meet and where there is no wine. Whereas, when talking about a 'coffee shop' like to say : « Would you like to come around for coffee ? » it rather refers to a respectful place with more or less comfortable seats serving diverse drinks at different costs. In another context, the word 'cafe' indicates a place where lorry drivers may have a rest for a while.

To add a further layer to the complexity of the concept meaning in which culture penetrates our semantic structure, English cooking terms sometimes have specific meanings. For instance, almost all cultures have devised some means of baking, like to cook some bread or other food in an oven. Boiling or cooking food in water or some other liquid,

is as well another technique universally practised. A related process, stewing, means to boil slowly or gently a mixture usually of meat, vegetables and water. In a similar way the cooking process of roasting, denotes the idea to cook meat in its juices over an open fire or in an oven. While the terms to describe the various cooking methods have a literal meaning in formal English. In informal English they are rather sometimes used to describe human behaviours in a humorous way. Half-baked for instance, may refer to a foolish idea or that someone is a stupid person. Boiling or boiling mad means being very angry. 'in a stew' means to be worried or to be in a difficult situation and 'to stew in one's own juices' means to suffer, especially from one's own actions. 'To roast a person' means to criticise or ridicule him without mercy. Finally, in other cases a person through his excessive relish of life, might get picked and end up in a jam.

Yet, another way in which culture pervades our semantic structure is in the metonymic relations it entertains with language; some terms might be semantically equivalent, but they have quite different social / cultural connotations in each language / culture. For example, comparing English to Arabic in this regard, one may claim that Arabic speakers are obliged by virtue of the fact that they speak Arabic to make such distinctions of socio-cultural connotations. A word like *friend* is defined as '*person one knows and likes, but is not a relation, expressing sometimes the existence of a physical relationship*', i.e. involving friendship/love; this definition is basically valid for most western cultures and societies. However, in Arabic the word /sadi : q / ( fiend ) involves not only friendship and love, but honesty and faithfulness as well. In sum, many words are assigned culture-specific meaning. In terms of untranslatability, the word /tareb/ (the highest level of artistic musical performance) could in no way have an equivalent in the English language. Similarly, the term sheikh / *sheikh* / is socio-culturally denoting in the Arabic language a form of respect to refer to both old people or teachers, holding moral values, while in the French language it is only to introduce one's father saying

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“le vieux”. English language, too, has no word corresponding to the German ‘Schadenfreude’ (denoting a happiness about someone else’s misfortune). This short list reveals socio-culturally speaking, the use of cooking concepts and some social life connotations as colloquial expressions to picture human conduct more vividly.

All in all, at this level the conceptual system of a particular culture is, in reality, embodied in its language. Likewise, the vocabulary of a language is indeed an inventory of the items a culture talks about, and has categorised in order to make sense of the word, because categorisation has also a socio-cultural basis since items which are characterised as similar in one environment may not be viewed as such in another one. The world is not simply the way it is, but what we make of

through language. This is why Sapir claims:

*Language is becoming increasingly valuable as a guide to the scientific study of a given culture[...] language is primarily a cultural or social product and must be understood as such.*

(1921 : 161-162)

Thus, good comparative or contrastive studies of concepts meaning are somehow delicate since it is difficult methodologically to compare cases that emerge out of different structural contexts. Language is only meaningful in context thus socio-culturally coded. It is culture consciousness.

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