Selected theories of intercultural pragmatics applied to literary translation

Henrieta Kuzderová
University of Prešov in Prešov, Slovakia
henrieta.kuzder@gmail.com

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The field of translation studies has noticed several shifts in the way of how theorists look at translation. These changes are called *turns in translation studies*. In the recent years quite a lot of attention has been paid to ideologies and their influence on translation. Culture and ideology are two aspects of society that tend to influence each other and it is rather difficult to differentiate between the two. As Peter Fawcett asks in his study: "Is all human activity ideologically motivated? When is something 'ideology' rather than just 'culture'? What is the difference?" (Baker, 1998, p. 106) *Ideological turn* in translation studies was preceded by, among others, so called *cultural turn*. Culture plays a great role in analysing translation. Cultural studies and translation studies are closely related, as translations is a type of intercultural communication. The need of cooperation of these two fields was already emphasised by Susan Bassnett (1998), she even speaks of so called *translation turn in cultural studies*. István Kecskés deals with intercultural communication and its specific features in his work *Intercultural Pragmatics* (2014). In the present paper, attempts were made to discuss translation as a form of written communication that is of intercultural nature from the point of view of selected theories and insights presented by Kecskés in his aforementioned publication.

The present paper is divided into several subchapters according to the chosen theories presented by Kecskés. His claims and ideas are confronted with other theories from the field of translation studies and are viewed from the point of view of their possible application to literary translation. It is discussed whether the theories which, in his publication, are mainly applied to and illustrated on spoken communication also work for written translations. To provide examples from an authentic translated text, a book by Peter Pišťánek *Rivers of Babylon* (originally written in Slovak) and its English translation by Peter Petro were chosen. The aim of the paper is to find out whether the selected notions of intercultural pragmatics presented by István Kecskés can be applied to literary translation or to what extent. Four selected insights presented by István Kecskés in his *Intercultural Pragmatics* (2014) are discussed in the following chapters: *discourse-segment perspective*, *third culture* and *intercultures*, *pragma-dialogue* and *pragma-discourse*, *cultural models* and *encyclopaedic knowledge*. An emphasis is laid on the strong connection between language, culture and the currently widely debated ideology. It is examined what implications it has for literary translation and the choice of translation strategies.

Discourse-Segment Perspective in the Process of Translating Literary Texts

Kecskés claims that in *intercultural pragmatics*, as opposed to "normal" pragmatics which he defines as "an utterance based inquiry" (Kecskés, 2014, p. 7), the communicators are "creative on discourse level rather than on utterance level" (ibid.). This happens due to their limited language proficiency. Let us first explain the terms *utterance* and *discourse*. *Utterance* can be understood as a realisation of a sentence i.e. a small meaningful unit in

communication. *Discourse* is something bigger, it is a group of utterances e.g. a dialogue. Intercultural communication differs from the "normal" so called intracultural communication which takes place within one language or culture. In communication, it is sometimes necessary to go beyond the utterance to be able to infer the meaning, to understand the whole message. One could argue that this happens in intracultural communication as well. There is always more to communication than pure words or sentences. Communication and language function in a social context and their participants are people, social beings. They live in a society which influences their behaviour. They are formed, guided and influenced by the society, culture, and ideology. (Lefevere, 1992; Baker, 2006) The immediate context is not always sufficient in communication, even if the communication proceeds within one culture and language. This may be caused by the use of *formulaic language* (Kecskés, 2014) i.e. fixed language expressions which are not always transparent and may have several meanings, mostly figurative. An example by Kecskés:

> *A: Coming for a drink?*
> *B: Sorry, I can't. My doctor won't let me.*
> *A: What's wrong with you?*

The phrase *What´s wrong with you?* may have at least two interpretations (concern in a friend's health and making fun of his attitude) while both are suitable for this context. The identification of the meaning can cause problems in intercultural communication. (ibid.)

Translation is a form of intercultural communication. Discourse-Segment Perspective, as presented in the theory of Intercultural Pragmatics appears to be reflected in the process of lexical choice and translation strategies used by translators. Translators are there to prevent possible misunderstanding and go "beyond the utterance" already during the process of translating. In translation, it can not only happen that a phrase has several possible interpretations suitable for the given context, sometimes there is no possible interpretation whatsoever as the concept is unknown in the target culture. This is especially true for the source elements of the text which are related to culture, politics and ideologies of the source culture. An example from the translation of *Rivers of Babylon*:

> *"Sú tam samé predajne. Domáce potreby, drogéria, Mototechna a Kožatex."*
> *"There are only shops there. Shops selling household goods, a chemist's, a car parts shop and a leather goods shop."*

The target reader of the English translation is most probably not familiar with, among others, a Slovak proper name *Mototechna* used for shops selling car parts. The translator expected the potential misunderstanding which could arise due to intercultural communication and he decided to use the translation strategy of *generalisation* – using a general term to ensure comprehensibility on the side of the target culture audience (Venuti, 1995) – and translated the word as *a car parts shop*. The same strategy was applied in the case of translation of the Slovak proper name *Kožatex* denoting a shop which sells leather goods.

It could be agreed that sometimes in communication utterance context is not sufficient, even the immediate context is sometimes not enough. In case of intercultural communication, even the background knowledge is sometimes of very little, if any, help as it is based on different cultural backgrounds. In case of literary translation, the communication, analogous to the discourse in spoken communication, is slightly different. It proceeds between the translator and the target reader. The means of this communication is the actual translation. The translator communicates the meaning, the ideas, the information, between the two cultures. The target readers can not ask the translator a question in case they are not sure what was meant by the individual translation decisions the translator used. Translators have to think about the possible misunderstanding or misinterpretation beforehand i.e. during the process of translating, and intervene in order to prevent misinterpretation, misunderstanding or in some cases even incomprehension, some words could be not understood at all if they hadn´t been

adjusted to the target audience. The translators need to opt for various translation strategies and lexical choices in order to fulfil the function of translation i.e. to ensure effective communication between the source culture and the target culture.

The Third Culture and Intercultures

In case of any intercultural communication, something that is called *third space* emerges. It is defined by Kecskés as a space "that combines elements of each of the participant's original cultures in novel ways." (Kecskés, 2014, p. 13) If the participants of communication do not share the same language, such communication acquires new features, it is different. The same thing happens when translating literature. A translated book is neither something that would fit perfectly into the source language and literature nor a work of art which would smoothly harmonize with the target language and literature. It is something in-between created by the combination of both and so it creates and brings something new. A criterion for adequacy when evaluating a translation has been the "naturalness". If the translation reads smoothly, fluently, as if it was a work written originally in the target language, it is considered "good". However, a translation is not that easily made natural. The original may feel innate for the source culture, while the translation has to be made "natural" for the target culture. It is necessarily influenced by cultures and ideologies. If the translation feels smooth to the target reader, it must have "absorbed" the ideology and cultural models typical and normal for the target culture. The translator remains invisible as he creates this illusion of naturalness. This approach has been criticised by Lawrence Venuti, mainly in *The Translator's Invisibilty*. (1995) Is this illusion really necessary? Cultures might benefit from this "third space" – they could learn about the other cultures and become more tolerant, and maybe perceive the world from a slightly different point of view thanks to translations.

Interculture, similarly to third culture, is something evanescent, it appears in a conversation and then it disappears, as any type of speech usually does unless it is recorded. (Kecskés, 2014) This is the case of spoken communication. However, translations i.e. a type of written intercultural communication does not disappear. They form the above mentioned "third culture" and there remains the evidence of this intercultural interaction in the form of translated pieces of literature. It can not be said that the researchers in the field of translation studies do not care what will be left behind us, what interculture emerges and what third culture is being created, taking into consideration the numerous discussions and critical analyses of translations. Translation is something that will not disappear. That is why, it needs to be done carefully and with precision, it has to be criticised and worked on. Regarding the analysed novel (*Rivers of Babylon*), its translation itself creates third culture. It creates an invisible "bridge" between the two cultures. The target audience (reading the English translation) gets to meet and become familiar with the small European country, Slovakia, and its culture, the then ideology, political situation and the life of people.

An example from the novel:

> *"Na vojne skúšal fajčiť. Kto nefajčil, ten nebol chlap. Nikdy mu však cigarety nechutili. A keď mu raz kamaráti ako rotnému hlupákovi podali špeciálne preparovanú cigaretu, po ktorej z neho tieklo vrchom i spodkom, zanevrel na fajčenie a začal posilňovať a boxovať."*

> *"He tried smoking in the army. If you didn't smoke, you weren't a man. But he never liked the taste of cigarettes. And when his comrades gave him, as the dunce of the squad, a specially doctored cigarette that gave you squits as well as making you throw up, he went off smoking and took up body-building and boxing."*

In Slovakia, military service was mandatory at the time where the plot of the book *Rivers of Babylon* is set. An example from the novel illustrates the relationships within a group of soldiers who spent their time together while doing the military service and also the

perspective of a man who experienced the mandatory military service.

Pragma-dialogue and Pragma-discourse in the Process of Translating Literary texts

There are three basic sub-branches of pragmatics dealing with communication (Kecskés, 2014):

   a) *Pragma-Semantics* (focuses on the theory of language understanding)
   b) *Pragma-Dialogue* (stresses the dialogic nature of communication)
   c) *Pragma-Discourse* (focuses on the "third space" being created in communication)

Kecskés highlights the importance of the two approaches which apply the holistic top-down view (i.e. going beyond the utterance in analysis): Pragma-Dialogue and Pragma-Discourse. Pragma-Semantics is a traditional sub-branch dealing with communication, stating that the one who constructs the meaning is the hearer. The theory of pragma-discourse (the insight represented by István Kecskés) was partially covered in the subchapter discussing the notions of *third culture* and *third space*. Now, let us take a look at the Pragma-Dialogue. Both Pragma-Dialogue and Pragma-Discourse use the term *interlocutor* for a participant of communication rather than terms *sender* and *receiver* or *speaker* and *hearer*. Interlocutor stands for both roles as both theories stress the dialogic nature of communication i.e. the interlocutor performs both roles in communication. The key notion of Pragma-Dialogue, as its name implies, is the dialogue and the dialogic nature of communication. Dialogue is defined as "a sequence of utterances, a reciprocal conversation between two or more entities." (Kecskés, 2014, p. 10) This implies that when we speak, we always perform a certain action which then receives a reaction. An example provided by Kecskés:

   Action-directive BILL: Can I get a cup of coffee?
   Info-request SARA: Milk?
   Signal-nonunderstanding BILL: Hm?
   Info-request SARA: Do you want your coffee black?
   Agreement BILL: Oh yes, thanks.

These kinds of ellipses and language economy are typical of everyday communication. Much information can be inferred from the immediate context or using the background knowledge. In case of misunderstanding, an interlocutor may send out a signal which is then reacted on and so the effective communication proceeds. How does this work in translation? The role of a translator translating a piece of literature is undoubtedly not easy. The target language reader cannot really ask the author what he meant by a word or a phrase in the translation. Of course, they can always google it and try to find some sources that could help; however, this is not usually expected of those reading fiction. Reading scientific literature usually requires further search for information and reading in order to understand the point. Literary translation, however, should be read for pleasure and the reader should not be disturbed by too many words or phenomena they do not understand. Similarly to Discourse-Segment Perspective, Pragma Discourse, as presented in the theory of Intercultural Pragmatics by Kecskés (2014) also seems to reflect in the process of lexical choice and translation strategies used by translators. The task of a translator is to "get into the head of a future reader" and look at the source text through their eyes in order to be able to see the points which probably might not be easily understood. Then the translator has to adjust, tailor the text into a form that is adequate for the target reader. They have to predict what might go wrong, all those situations that would be easily solved in a traditional dialogue in spoken communication. Thus, when working on a literary translation, the translator seems to perform the above mentioned actions and reactions in his head. An example of a possible inner dialogue of this kind could be illustrated on a choice made by the translator translating the analysed novel (*Rivers of Babylon*) into English.

   "....poľnohospodárska škola..." "....agricultural college..."

The word *škola* could be easily translated as *school*. In Slovak, *poľnohospodárska škola*

denotes either a secondary school, one which trains its students for a particular job, or a type of university study programme in the field of agriculture. In the analysed book, the main character claims to have studied at the *poľnohospodárska škola* for two years i.e. it can be assumed that he had studied at a university. In Slovak, in informal communication, people tend to use the word *škola* for each level of education. However, the English word *school* is rather associated with an education place for children. Would the target reader understand the concept if it was translated as *agricultural school*? This might have been one question that the translator asked himself during the process of translating and deciding on which translation strategy to use. He must have answered it himself, though. The concept was translated as *college*, the translator opted for a word that is known and used in the target culture, he used the strategy of *domestication*, a translation equivalent denoting a concept which is familiar to the target culture. (Venuti, 1995) The translators need to opt for various translation strategies based on the text they are translating. One of the ways of how to give the target culture reader the idea of various concepts of the source culture is to use aforementioned strategy of domestication.

Cultural Models and Encyclopaedic Knowledge
Socio-cognitive approach is the approach favoured by István Kecskés in *Intercultural Pragmatics*. This approach is based on the theory that linguistic system is rooted in the conceptual system. (2014) The language that we use is influenced by our knowledge, our perception of the world. How we perceive the world is dictated by the society we live in, by our cultural background. Similar insights have been presented by several theorists in the field of translation studies like Mona Baker or André Lefevere, to name but a few. In her *narrative theory*, Baker defines *narratives* as "the stories we live by." (2006, p. 3) They are influenced by society, culture, ideology and they have an impact on our behaviour as well as on our language behaviour etc. Lefevere similarly claims that "translations are not made in a vacuum. Translators function in a given culture at a given time. The way they understand themselves and their culture is one of the factors that may influence the way in which they translate." (1992, p. 14) How we use language, be that speech, writing, or translation, depends on how we perceive the world.

Encyclopaedic knowledge, defined as "a structured system of knowledge, organised as a network" (Kecskés, 2014, p. 82) of individuals is created during their life, it is shaped and formed gradually. The structure of encyclopaedic knowledge is built on so called *cultural models*. This concept has been used by several theorists but named by various terms (*schemas*, *frames*, *models*, *scripts*), all denoting the same concept. *Cultural models* are mental models which we acquire and store in our mind. It is how we perceive certain situations within our culture. If we experience a situation that looks familiar, we use cultural models to apply them on the situation and so we know what to expect etc. (Kecskés, 2014) Cultural models also have to be applied when translating a piece of literature. A translator has to bear in mind the presuppositions, cultural models and prevailing ideologies of both source and the target culture in order to be able to understand what is meant by the text and then be able to pass it to the target audience. An example from the analysed novel:

> "*So ženou sa dávno rozviedol, domov nemá a po slobodárňach sa mu bývať nechce.*"
> "*He divorced his wife a long time ago, he has no home and he won't sleep in a dormitory.*"

The translator decided to translate the word *slobodárňach* (the nominative *slobodáreň*) as *dormitory*. The word *slobodáreň* is derived from the word *slobodný* meaning not married and it describes a type of cheap accommodation that used to be provided by government to single people. It resembles living in a dormitory which could have been the reason why the translator opted for this generalised equivalent. This type of accommodation was provided at

the time when the plot of the analysed book takes place. The political regime in Slovakia was different than the one in the target readers´ culture (English speaking countries). This is why the translation of the term had to be adapted to the target cultural models. It can be stated that the translator used a combination of two translation techniques introduced by Venuti – *generalisation*, using a general term, and so called *domestication*, using a word denoting a concept which is familiar to the target culture. (1995)

To sum up, theories related to ideology and culture in the field of translation studies seem to share common ground with intercultural pragmatics. Translation is also a form of intercultural communication. It can be seen that the choice of translation strategies used in the analysed literary translation of Pišťanek's *Rivers of Babylon* is influenced by cultural differences and presuppositions. These are embedded in culture, society and language and needed to be taken into consideration during the process of translating. The translator of the novel applied several translation strategies e.g. domestication, generalization.

In case of critical discourse analysis, it is crucial to look at translated texts from a broader perspective, to go beyond the utterance, as emphasised by Kecskés in his approach to analysis of intercultural communication. The reason for this is the already mentioned fact that each literary text, including translations, emerges in a certain context, in a certain society. These factors influence the texts and this impact tends to be more visible when applying a top-down view. Society, culture and ideology play their role in shaping cultural models. These models, discussed within the field of intercultural communication, are especially important in literary translation. Translators have to feel and master the possible presuppositions of both source and target culture in order to be able to transfer them properly so that they suit the cultural schemas of the target audience.

In conclusion, theories related to ideology and culture in the field of translation studies and intercultural pragmatics share common ground. Several insights of intercultural pragmatics can be applied to literary translation and may result in some interesting connections, implications and arouse questions for further research.

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Summary

Selected Theories of Intercultural Pragmatics Applied to Literary Translation

The present study attempts to answer the question whether the selected theories and notions of intercultural pragmatics presented by István Kecskés in his Intercultural Pragmatics (2014) can be applied to literary translation or to what extent. Bearing in mind the ideological turn in translation studies, four selected insights are discussed: discourse-segment perspective, third culture and intercultures, pragma-dialogue and pragma-discourse, cultural models and encyclopaedic knowledge. An emphasis is laid on the connection between language, culture and the currently widely debated topic of ideology. The paper points out the possible implications of intercultural pragmatics for translation strategies and solutions used in literary translation.