The Relationship between Attitude towards Politics and the Quality of Political Translation

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ABSTRACT

This research attempted to investigate the relationship between the attitudes of translators towards politics and the quality of their political translations. To this end, 30 students, majoring in English translation, were selected as the participants of the study. An attitude questionnaire was devised and administered to estimate the attitudes of the translator trainees towards politics. They were then asked to translate extracts of three political texts taken from “BBC News”. The translations were rated and the results were compared with their responses to the attitude questionnaire. The study followed an ex post facto design with no treatment. Analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between translator trainees' attitudes towards politics and the quality of their renderings of political texts. Based upon the findings of the study, the paper also aims at making certain useful suggestions to promote a better instruction on political translation. It briefly on how families, mass-media, most importantly, translation teachers, attempt to implant positive attitudes towards politics in students and, at the same time, how they can play a very crucial role in forming, shaping and affecting attitudes towards politics.

Suggested Citation:

1. Introduction

Throughout history, translation has played a central role in human life. It has contributed to the processing and exchange of information and has provided access to different materials. Accordingly, translation and the different factors affecting it, have been and are continuously investigated. One of the areas that can be investigated is the psychological traits of the translator such as their attitude towards what they are translating. Much has been said about the role of attitude in learning languages and an extensive body of research has been carried out, approaching this issue from different perspectives and in a multitude of various contexts (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Ellis, 2008). The attitudinal information of language learners, a number of different aspects involved in learning a language, has been surveyed on (Dornyei, 2003). As Ellis mentions, the span of this domain of research ranges from studies on learners’ attitudes towards their own language and culture, the target language, its speakers and culture, the social value of learning the target language to language learning in general. Also, Karahan (2007) believes that positive language attitudes let learner have positive orientation towards learning English. As such, there seems to be a common agreement on the resounding influence of positive attitudes towards the task of learning a second/foreign language (Lightbown & Spada, 1999).

However, the impact, positive or negative attitudes might have on applied aspects of learning languages, has been a somehow neglected area for educators and researchers. One of the major areas in which ESL/EFL learners can apply their knowledge of English is the vast domain of translation. Professionals in the field have managed to examine a multitude of different factors and elements believed to impede or assist the formation of a “good” translation (Farahzad, 2003; Palumbo, 2009). Unfortunately, the probable effect of psychological factors, related to translators, professional or amateur, involved in the task, have not been adequately shed light on.

With respect to the somehow intricate and specialized nature of political texts, their translation seems to be one of the, if not the most, delicate and complex challenges for any translator. Naturally, the general tendency is to consider translation as a task that anybody can do with the help of a dictionary. However, the fact is that producing a written text, using another text as a basis, is a much more complex phenomenon. This complexity becomes more evident when the text in question deals with specialized subjects such as politics. When words belonging to the so-called General English appear next to specific terms and within a specific context, they contain nuances that must be accounted for in the final translation. The translator must take into account the contextual clues embedded in the discourse in order to avoid ambiguities in the produced document. In this bewildering territory, and amidst of so many perspectives and theories, the question often encountered is- what role does the personal attitude of the translator play in the final outcome of translation?

In order to find out answer to the question mentioned above, the present study was carried out with the hope of investigating the probability of a positive correlation between the translators’ attitudes towards politics and the quality of their translation of political texts. The study also aimed at discussing this relationship, if there appears to be any, and the ways in which the educators, and other entities related to this phenomenon, can think of implanting and
Creating positive attitude, among their students, towards politics with the aim of improving the quality of their political translations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Attitude

Bernstein et al (1988) describe attitude as a particular tendency towards a cognitive, emotional or behavioral reaction to an event, a person or an object. This definition is one of the most comprehensive in the field as it emphasizes three components of attitude which should be paid attention to in any delivered definition of it. These components are the cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects of attitude. Overall, evidence indicate that people have an inherit need to strive for balance, consistency and order (Katz, 1960, cited in Hogg and Copper, 2007) and that attitudes serve four major functions for the individual: 1) the utilitarian function, 2) the value-expressive function, 3) the ego-defensive function, and 4) the knowledge function. As a case in point, people have an inherent need to protect their self-image and they help to shape or reinforce our attitudes toward an object as likes or dislikes. However, our attitudes are also related to our self-presentation, self-perception and self-justification. Whenever the attitude of a person, subject, or situation is to be examined, the cognitive aspect of his/her attitude refers to thoughts or beliefs expressed by them regarding the object of attitude. The affective component refers to the feelings associated with that attitude, while the behavioral component incorporates observable behavior of a person as a reflection of their attitudes, feelings and thoughts or as means of expressing them (Davies & Houghton, 1995; Glassman & Hadad, 2004). For example, based on his/her negative attitude towards politics, a translator trainee may believe that politics is without any significance or lacking enthusiasm (cognitive component), get bored or frustrated in translation of political texts in class (affective component), and avoid participating in the class or engaging in reading political texts.

2.2 Political Translation

The analysis of a text in a source language must not be limited to a study of syntactic relationships between linguistic units or to the denotative meaning of words. According to Nida (1964), the connotative evaluation of the formal structures of the message is essentially an analysis of the style of the communication and the main area of stylistic concern is the discourse; this evaluation involves a number of highly complex techniques. The nature of the message, the purpose of the author and the translator and the type of audience can affect the type of translation. In many cases the translator wants to suggest a particular type of political behavior. He may rather have an imperative purpose, i.e. to make an action explicit and compelling and thus is what happens in translation of political discourse. So what Nida calls gloss translation which typifies the formal equivalence is not appropriate for this discourse. In fact, Translators should be able to work at high levels of cross cultural competence into which complex problems carry over. Through translation as a bridge between various discourses, information is made available to address issues beyond natural borders; it is very frequently the case that reactions in one country to statements that were made in another country are actually reactions to the information as it was provided in translation. The linguistic behavior, which is related to political behavior may well reflect evidence of behavior mediated by translation (Schaffner,
In the literature, some studies have concentrated on the way translators manipulate political texts, of which Bilal et al. (2011) analyzed two episodes of a very popular talk show of a private television channel of Pakistan, intended to reveal how the ideologies were represented in these shows, and found out that these talk shows mystify the agency of processes by using various strategies. Their critical text analyses how speakers’ choices enable them to manipulate the realizations of agency and power in the representation of action to produce particular meanings which are not always explicit for all readers. A multitude number of studies were conducted to approach political translation from different perspectives. However, as the backgrounds of the studies indicate, a very small number of practical studies have been done regarding attitude towards politics and its role in producing qualified translations. Therefore, the current study aims to find out a relationship between translator trainees’ attitudes towards politics and the quality of their renderings of political texts. Based upon the findings of the study, the paper also aims at making certain useful suggestions to promote a better instruction on political translation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

An intact group, with an aggregate of 30 male and female undergraduate students majoring in English translation at Buali-Sina University, Iran formed the participants for the study. The participants all had Persian as their native language and concentrated on translating either from English into Persian or vice versa. These were students of the seventh academic semester and had already passed preliminary and rudimental courses on translation. Therefore, the researcher was insured that they were all equipped with at least the fundamental theoretical foundations and principles of translation and that they all shared almost the same level of knowledge in the field. This way, their performance in the translations they were assigned to do could not have been attributed to the lack of familiarity with the genre. Moreover, it was ascertained that none of these participants had had any professional experience in the field of political translation in order to remove the role their repetitious prior experience might play in determining the quality of their renderings.

In order to check the homogeneity of the participants, and that they entered the experience of translation with the same level of English proficiency, a Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT) was administered. The choice of this test, as a means of assuring our homogeneous subjects, seemed to be appropriate, since CELT is one of the very few valid and reliable instruments not including a listening comprehension section. The evaluation of listening comprehension skill was found as irrelevant to the objectives of the researcher as it played no part in the process of translation. After performing statistical procedures on the scores, gained from CELT, it was revealed that ratios of skewness and kurtosis, over their respective standard errors, were within the ranges of plus and minus 1.96. Thus, it was concluded that the CELT enjoys a normal distribution and that our population was of a homogeneous level of English proficiency.

| Skewness | -0.51 / 0.427 = -1.19 |
| Kurtosis | -1.44 / 0.833 = -1.72 |

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of CELT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>78.96</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>7.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2. Attitude Questionnaire

An attitude questionnaire of 20 questions, in the format of a Likert Scale, was devised in order to estimate the general attitude of students towards politics in general, not specifying the language of its delivery. It consisted of statements on a range of various aspects of politics including its role and significance in the participants’ lives, the power it has against existing realities, information it provides and so forth. The participants had to specify their opinion about and degree of agreement with the statements by choosing one of the five options ranging from “I strongly agree with the statement” to “I strongly disagree with the statement”.

The Cronbach’s alpha reliability for 20 items of the questionnaire was calculated to be .91, indicating a high reliability index. This was hoped to provide the researcher with a truthful account of the participants’ opinions of and attitudes of politics in general.

3.3. Material

After reviewing and considering a number of political texts, three political news texts, taken from BBC News website were selected, of each an extract of almost ten lines were given to the participants in order to be translated from English into Persian. The particular extracts were chosen because they reflected a descriptive and narrative nature, believed to be more revealing of different critical factors in the participants’ performances on translating political texts. The complete news were both read by all the students as a requirement for one of their courses and later on class discussions on different aspects of the news were debated on and personal interpretations were shared with the whole class. This was significant to the researcher since students were not just given isolated extracts of news they had not read or been acquainted with. Having had previous familiarity with the stories, the students were expected to be faced with less difficulty translating them and to have a better, more accurate understanding of the mood which would enable them have a more faithful rendition of the texts.

3.4. Procedure

The participants were asked to focus on the act of translation as an extracurricular activity at home and were provided with a sufficient amount of time to spend on the task. Knowing that their course’s evaluation would not be jeopardized in the aftermath of their less than perfect translations, students could concentrate on the task away from inhibitions and negative affective factors. Moreover, allocation of sufficient time for completion of the task minimized the intimidation and pressure of the assignment, giving all students the equal chance of employing all knowledge and intuition they had at their disposal.

After the completion of the translations, 27 students, who had handed their translations on both extracts, were selected as the focus participants whose renderings were to be rated. Three raters were asked to examine the quality of the translations and to score them according to Method C of Waddington’s (2001) proposed method of evaluation of translations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Accuracy of transfer of ST content</th>
<th>Quality of expression in TL</th>
<th>Degree of task completion</th>
<th>Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Waddington scale for holistic method C
4. Results and Discussion

All three raters based their evaluations of the renderings on clear objectives of the proposed assessment method. In order to avoid any inconsistencies in the criteria and the implications of personal preferences in ratings, the correlation between the three ratings was estimated. As it has been indicated in the table below, all three raters enjoyed a significant inter-rater reliability.

**Table 3: Inter-rater reliability among the three raters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rater 1</th>
<th>Rater 2</th>
<th>Rater 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.764**</td>
<td>.883**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.764**</td>
<td>.883**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.778**</td>
<td>.883**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

Afterwards, in order to probe any probable significant relationship between students’ attitudes towards politics and the quality of their political translations, a Pearson correlation was run. The Pearson R was .278. Based on these results it can be concluded that there was indeed a significant relationship between students’ attitude towards politics, the main subject of their translations, and the quality of their renderings of political texts. The descriptive statistics of Pearson correlation is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Descriptive statistics of Pearson Correlation for the relationship between students’ attitudes towards politics and quality of their translations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude towards Politics</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Translation Quality</td>
<td>.278</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level**
Translation, of political texts or what is known as political translation in some of the academic centers, is one of the most utilized tools for providing information in mass media. Although in the educational system of universities in Iran only one course has been devoted to this genre, political translation is widely used in every corner of news circles. The high percentage of political texts covered in newspapers and magazines suggests the real position of this branch of translation.

Translating any text requires very special skills that go far beyond linguistics (Bielsa and Bassnett, 2009). However, translating political texts is somehow different from other types of translation in the way that attitude and ideologies of the translators and the sponsoring institute affect the story. What is considered as an assassination attempt by the source language writer may be interpreted as a desperate defensive act or part of an operation in resistance against an oppressive regime by the translator/ his commissioner and this will affect how the news item would be translated (Gholami, 2009). Making choices presupposes first the possibility of choices, and then agency, values and accountability (Hermans, 2009).

Attitudes are learned predispositions by one's indirect exposure to a culture or group through television, movies, books and other sources that may not be reliable. According to Herr (1949, in Seker, 2003) certain features, that may have a role in attitude formation, are respectively family, school and the press. As far as the Iranian context is concerned, most frequently, families tend to be reluctant to have their children indulged in political issues. Therefore, it might be true that the extent of students' familiarity with politics is obviously less than other genres such as literature and economics. Hence, most of the time, they form negative attitudes towards politics. One of the other reasons that students remain obdurate on their avoidance of involvement in politics is that from their very early encounters with politics in their first language, educational system has made them develop negative feelings and attitudes towards it. To a great extent, the school system and teachers are to be held culpable for this failure in creating a positive connection between students and political texts. Press shall also be taken as one of the reasons for students’ obduracy regarding indulging in politics. In newspapers and magazines, political texts are frequently addressed to adults and most of the times, news sections in the mass media are not directed to youths.

One of the expectations that Iranian university students of translation have from their academic courses is that they should be devised with their mere focus on the theory and practice of translation. Having this in mind, they find courses like translation of economic texts in complete congruence with their personal and academic objectives. In order to elevate their knowledge and expertise in different branches of translation, and as a part of their course requirements, these students are disposed to concentrate on theories of translation, retention of technical terms and study of translations in the field by professionals. Surprisingly, there is an apparent conversion of students' moods into rather passive and unmotivated statues when it comes to the course of political translations. Although the number and scope of the examples of political texts being translated into or from English during the course is very limited due to the constraints of class time, students do not seem to seek opportunities to allocate more time and energy to this particular translation genre. Students rarely engage in reading political texts either in Persian or in English with the aim of effectively using their familiarity with

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this realm in their translations of political texts. They are reluctant to actively and passionately indulge in reading political texts, having this misconception that their field of study is not related to politics. Hence, whereas they willingly study and examine texts and translations of other genres, they are scarcely apt to approach political texts as precious sources, laden with implicit intricacies of the art of translation.

What is obvious from the study is the fact that attitude towards politics affects the quality of political renderings. The translator of political texts can not be considered as mere translator who enjoys good knowledge of both source and target language alongside good background knowledge on the subject. As the study indicated, having positive attitudes towards politics is also one of the effective factors in rendering good translation. Translations of those students who thought of politics as informative, effective, enjoyable and so forth was indicative of their enthusiasm towards translating, taking into account text constraints, lexical, grammatical and technical adjustments and most importantly purpose of translation. However, those who were reluctant to translate political texts or those who had negative attitudes towards political texts, most of the time rendered literal translations, not considering the connotative and contextual meanings.

Whatever the source of these students’ attitudes, it must be remembered that although attitudes are difficult to change once they are formed, their reformation is never impossible. Hence, if students’ attitudes towards politics are shown to be in a direct correlation with the quality of their political translations, an effort put on instilling a more welcoming enthusiasm towards politics seems to be a sound investment. A long educating these students on the technicalities of translation, the implementation of practical and effective methods to change their attitudes could greatly influence their performance on translating these texts. Being enlightened about the positive effect having welcoming attitudes could have on the outcome of their translations, students can embrace reading political texts with less negativity.

Students’ families can be one of the effective factors in helping students having positive attitudes towards politics. They can encourage them to read political texts in newspapers and magazines. They can analyze these texts with the students so that they would get familiar with this particular genre in their first language. Teachers and translation instructors can also contribute to the implantation of enthusiasm and positive attitudes towards politics in students by applying an effective methodology and the appropriate selection and introduction of materials. The political pieces chosen should be appealing enough to create a willingness in learners to be actively engaged in the process of reading and therefore utmost care should be taken regarding learners' interest and expectations in this selection.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between scores gained from translations of two political texts and an attitude questionnaire administered to the same participants. The research provided evidence that there was a significant relationship between attitude towards politics and English-to-Persian political translation of students. The findings of this study provide further evidence for the theoretical discussions favoring that attitude is a contributing factor to translation. Concordantly, it can be concluded that instilling a more welcoming attitude towards politics can be considered as
one of the factors that should be included in translator training systems to enhance the translation performance of future translators. To start with, translation teachers can apply procedures to develop positive attitudes in students towards politics and consequently improve their translation quality. This, of course, requires raising awareness among the teachers themselves on the benefits of developing positive attitudes in students.

About the Author

Nazanin Shadman holds M.A. in Translation Studies, Kharazmi University, Iran. She also works as a part-time instructor with the University of Kurdistan, Iran. Her major areas of research interest include: translation, translation assessment, reading literature and contrastive analysis on which she has written a number of articles and have also participated in various workshops and conferences related to these research interests.

Works Cited


Appendix: I

Below is a list of twenty statements. Please indicate what your attitude is towards each statement by circling one of the numbers from 1 – 5. Please try to answer all the questions and give your first thoughts on each statement. Don’t spend a lot of time weighing-up your answers. There aren’t any hidden catches. I just want to hear your opinions.

1 = **Strongly Agree** with the statement  
2 = **Agree** with the statement, but not very strongly  
3 = **Undecided** and can’t make up your mind  
4 = **Disagree** with the statement, but not very strongly  
5 = **Strongly Disagree** with the statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I view politics as an indirect way of information enrichment.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Politics familiarizes me with various perspectives on different topics.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I engage in reading political texts whenever possible.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Some political issues arouse emotions in me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I find politics an important topic in my life.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I see political texts as extremely informative material.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Politics makes me aware of my environment.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Reading political texts can prepare me more for challenges in life.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Politics can help me understand the world and people around me better.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Through politics I can learn about what goes on around the world.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Politics helps develop my interpretative abilities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Politics can improve the power of my analysis.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Politics is a valuable means for my personal growth.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Reading political texts gives me pleasure.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Politics makes me aware of the realities of life.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Through politics I can build my future.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix: 2**

Please translate the following paragraphs as comprehensible as you can.

**Africa demands aid boost**

The UK-led commission for Africa has urged wealthy nations to increase their aid to the continent. African leaders need to root out corruption and promote good governance, the commission’s final report says. Prime Minister said at a news conference in London that reducing poverty in Africa is the fundamental challenge of our generation and Africa can change for the better. There can be no excuse, no justification for the plight of millions of our fellow beings in Africa today, they said. They set up the commission, which includes several African leaders in February and promised to change UK policy to help Africa. Ethiopian Prime Minister said it represented a moment of awakening for Africa.

**BBC BUSINESS NEWS** (Friday, March 11, 2005)

**Insurgency threatens Iran-Pakistan-India**

A growing insurgency in Iran threatens to disrupt plans for a transnational pipeline that would deliver natural gas from Iran to Pakistan and India. The proposed $4 billion pipeline, a key priority for the federal government, will pass through Iran and Afghanistan. Armed nationalists have been stepping up attacks on Pakistan targets in recent weeks. The natural gas project holds the promise of big political dividends for Islamabad and New Delhi. Pakistani Prime Minister in an interview last week, said he hoped cooperation on the project would help ease tension with India over issues such as Kashmir, which shoring up future energy supplies for both countries.

**BBC BUSINESS NEWS** (Friday, December 10, 2004)

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