Automated translation and pragmatic force:
A discussion from the perspective of intercultural pragmatics

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This article discusses the challenges that the rendering of the pragmatic implications of texts into a target language posed for human translators and, by extension, for automated translation. It starts by discussing the importance of pragmatics, focusing on two concepts that have received much attention on the part of pragmaticians as well as translation scholars, namely implicatures and politeness. It moves to on to present some of the most notable publications on the interface between pragmatics and machine translation. These illustrate that the interest in the pragmatic value of language has not succeeded in advancing the integration of pragmatics into automated translation. Drawing on Kesckes and House, the last section discusses two concepts to be considered regarding the role of pragmatics in intercultural mediation.

Keywords: intercultural pragmatics, context, recontextualization, politeness, automated translation

1. Introduction

I would like to start with a confession: I am no specialist in machine translation. So, when Prof Wang Ning invited me to contribute to a special issue of *Babel* devoted to the challenges and advances in this subfield, my first reaction was to decline. Eventually, I decided to take up the challenge and focus on an area that has gradually gained momentum in translation studies: the role of pragmatics in the theory and practice of translation. In view of the growing interest in concepts such as speech acts, implicature, politeness and so on, I opted to consider some of these notions, paying particular attention to how they have been integrated in translation studies, and to explore the challenges posed by pragmatic implications in translation. In fact, although it has been claimed that machine translation can contribute to the expansion of knowledge and scholarly communication (Bowker & Buitrago Ciro 2019), in my own experience, machine-translated texts may be extremely useful in some contexts but a total failure in others.

Thus, this article aims to discuss the complexities of pragmatic force in intercultural communication and the difficulties it currently poses for automated translation. I would like to start with the definition of intercultural pragmatics, a relatively new subfield within pragmatics, proposed by Istvan Kecskes, probably the leading researcher in this area:

> Intercultural pragmatics is concerned with the way the language system is put to use in social encounters between human beings who have different languages, communicate in a common language, and, usually, represent different cultures. (Kecskes 2014: 14).

Kecskes's definition revolves around four key elements: different languages, different cultures, communication in a common language and social encounters. These elements allow Kecskes to defend the existence of 'intercultures', which are characterized as being situationally emergent and having situationally evolving features. The complex relationship between these four elements renders the translation practice a particularly challenging task. In intercultural communication, as we know, translators are not merely faced with linguistic structures and items that convey a stable meaning, but rather with elements (linguistic and non-linguistic) that require the translator to go beyond the literal or apparent meaning of words in order to convey the writer or speaker's intended meaning. This approach, which draws on the insights that conversation analysts, linguists and pragmaticians have gained since the 1950s, can be particularly beneficial when meaning depends largely on contextual and cultural factors. I would like to suggest several areas where machine translation would require a much greater degree of sophistication and/or development if is (ever) to produce satisfactory target texts.

The rest of the article is divided into four sections. The first two consider the role of context in the production and interpretation of meaning, and the importance of pragmatics in translation by focusing on the notions of implicature and politeness. The next one summarizes the attempts to incorporate pragmatics in automated translation research, while the final section draws on intercultural pragmatics and recontextualization as two of the main challenges for machine translation.

2. The importance of context in the production/interpretation of meaning

As an avenue of enquiry, pragmatics has much to offer to translation scholars and practitioners. It can also illustrate the difficulties that a pragmatics-informed approach poses for automated translation. This section considers how some of the most influential work in pragmatics has been incorporated into translation research in order to highlight the importance of context in translation.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) proposed an approach to language that focused on the acts performed by the speaker's utterances rather than on the words themselves. Although this approach was speaker-centred, the relevance of speech acts, they posited, was crucial to understand the creation and interpretation of meaning. Austin distinguished between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Simply put, locutionary refers to the form, illocutionary to the intended meaning and perlocutionary to the actions resulting from the interpretation of that meaning. In addition, what speakers mean is not "in the words themselves, but in the meaning implied" (Cutting 2015: 17). In other words, the speech acts we use to communicate are often characterized by their indirectness, which is present in most cultures, even though "some cultures use more indirectness than others" (Cutting 2015: 18). This has implications for intercultural communication and, hence, translation: meaning can be created depending on several factors, such as class, age, education, gender and so on.

Be that as it may, as the nature of the pragmatic force of language remains elusive, especially if we focus on speech acts, pragmatics has evolved in many directions since its emergence in the mid-20th century. In fact, according to Ariel (2010), who takes a grammar/inference approach to pragmatics, its canon includes not only speech acts but also reference and deixis, presuppositions, intonation, topicality, implicatures and inferences. And, more importantly, pragmatics is informed by grammar. The objective of Ariel's categorization is "to show that it is not possible to predict a priori whether some interpretation/use, or more often, some aspect of an interpretation/use is grammatical or pragmatic" (2010: 149). This is significant for translation and, more specifically, for machine translation: as pragmatic force depends on a division of labor between code and interpretation, it follows that it is not possible to make these predictions a priori and, consequently, the participation of these two elements in the creation of meaning will depend on external factors.

This challenge is increased when we consider unrelated languages. Matsushita, for instance, has discussed the case of Japanese and English in BuzzFeed, a news service that provides English content of Japanese news: “it is difficult to understand what content BuzzFeed Japan is offering based on the machine translation renditions of its headlines” (2019: 147). This example allows us to establish a link between the importance of pragmatic meaning and pragmatic force in the practice of translation, and highlights the need to study this relationship in translation scholarship: if machine translation causes problems in informative text types, these are likely to increase in texts whose aesthetic component is greater, e. g. narrative and poetry. As Dahlgren (2000: 100) claims, “in poetic discourse, there is not only explicit information, but also information that is not given but derived from some specific linguistic expression – inferred from it”. The ensuing question is whether in the translation of poetry this implicit information, which will require the translator to consider all the features of the source text (including, for example, the existence of intentional ambiguities and the way to preserve them) can be rendered adequately.

The next section considers some of these features.

3. The importance of pragmatics in translation

Despite the initial critical responses to the conceptualization of language as dependent on context, pragmatics rapidly made an impact on translation studies, probably because speech acts may be rule-governed, but rules are not equivalent in all languages and cultures (Hatim 2009: 205). In addition, conventions evolve, and translators will need to be aware of those changes in order to make the right decisions. For instance, Kohnen (2015) discussed the evolution of the pragmatic force of certain lexical elements in English, citing examples from Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale* and William Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. His research, although focusing on diachronic changes from Middle to twentieth-century English, serves to illustrate the changes of the pragmatic component of language and the need to delve into those changes in shorter periods of time as well.

In translation studies, the American translator and scholar Eugene A. Nida was among the first ones to stress the importance of pragmatics. Although in some quarters Nida may conjure up negative images associated with his role in the American Bible Society, his contribution to translation remains unparalleled in many ways. To be sure, in an article published in 1979, Nida underscored the importance of four factors: the message, the audience, the circumstances in which translation takes place and the circumstances in which the message is received (1079: 101). Although this article, significantly entitled “Translating means communicating”, was indeed published in *Technical Papers for the Bible Translator*, Nida was concerned with a wide variety of text types, including scientific papers, instructions, literature, songs and conversation. He stressed that translation involved real interlingual communication with its distinct “capacities, attitudes, presuppositions, and potential responses of receptors” (1979: 103), and, therefore, translators need to consider “who said what, to whom, under what circumstances, for what reasons, and for what purpose” (1979: 104). In other words, interlingual exchanges can be particularly problematic as receptors need to interpret meaning depending on the context and decide on the best way to render it. Of particular note is Nida’s reference to the expressive function of language characteristic of literary translation: as writers use language in a lyric, personal and reflexive way, translators will need to go beyond the apparent meaning of words to render the source texts into a target language: “personal involvement and interpretation are constantly in focus”, Nida claimed (1979: 105).

Since the publication of Nida’s work, pragmatics has attracted the interest of many other translation scholars. For instance, Leo Hickey, focusing on the relationship between stylistics and pragmatics, underscored the fact that pragmatics does not only analyze meaning, but also what speakers and writers do and how they do it in real situations, what they speak or write, and whom they intend to affect in one way or another (1989: 7-9). All these factors, Hickey claimed, are crucial to translate texts and, therefore, need to be considered when pragmatic meaning outweighs semantic meaning.

For her part, Juliane House’s work on translation and discourse analysis illustrates the difficulties posed by the relationship between context and text. Drawing on Malinowski, House posits that meaning in translation can only be captured if language is viewed as contextually embedded (2006: 343). Consequently, she suggests a theory of translation as recontextualization that considers the function of the text (2006: 345) with respect to its use by target users in the target culture. Ignoring this important factor, she claims, can produce serious pragmatic errors (2013: 542). Thus, the inability to assess the value of context in a machine-translated task is likely to produce inadequate results.

In the next subsections, I would like to discuss two specific concepts that demonstrate the challenges that pragmatic meaning can have in intercultural communication and, most importantly, in machine translation.

3.1. Implicatures

Conversational implicature, introduced by Grice (1975) as typical of any communication exchange, generally refers to the implied meaning of language in a specific context. Using translations into English of Danish literary texts, Malmkjaer (1998: 30) noted that implicatures depend on several factors, including the conventional meaning of words, the cooperative principle and its maxims, the co-text and the context, background knowledge, and the assumption that all the previous factors are available to the participants. To illustrate the above, let us consider the following extract from the American situation comedy *Frasier*. Apart from literary translation, audiovisual translation can also benefit from the insights of pragmatics, as it typically involves other elements (e.g. gestures) that convey additional meaning:

> Example
> Roz: Man, that was a great show. It was better than great! It was brilliant!
> Frasier: What do you want?

In principle, the two utterances appear unrelated. The exchange features Frasier, the protagonist, and Roz, the producer of Frasier's radio programme. Background knowledge is also necessary to understand the implied meaning: Frasier is familiar with Roz's strategies to ask for a favour. It also telling of the relationship between the speaker's intentions and the listener's ability to interpret Roz's utterance. For this reason, rather than using a polite formula such as "thank you", Frasier immediately and correctly infers the meaning. This type of inference may or may not work in other languages and, consequently, the translation of this brief exchange would depend on the existence of similar exchanges with similar implications in the target language.

Although Malmkjaer is to some extent critical of the applicability of Gricean's views of language to literary translation, she has also stressed that in the transfer of literary works much can indeed be achieved using the concept of implicature. Malmkjaer mentioned a few examples that illustrate the difficulties of performing automated translation of literary texts. For instance, punctuation and orthographic features can "be adjusted by editors/translators to suit a given readership" (1998: 37) to ensure that readers have access to the necessary cues for the right interpretation. In other cases, Malmkjaer pointed out (1998: 38), implicatures can be generated by means of additions such as the phrase "at his summer house" that the English translator of a Danish text added to introduce the island of Skagen to English audiences. While the source readers would be able to identify the island as a popular place to own a summer house, most English readers would not.

Hatim has also stressed that the notion of implicature can have important implications for translators (1997: 192-194). In his discussion of irony, Hatim (1997: 192) mentioned that the appeal of the Gricean cooperative principle is not the existence of rules, but rather the ways in which these rules can be broken:

> Example
> A: Is John back yet?
> B: The pubs are still open.

In this brief extract, which he borrowed from Johansson (1985: 205), speaker B has flouted the so-called maxim of relation, as there is no connection between the question and the answer. However, prior knowledge will help speaker A understand the implicature: "the speaker expects the hearer to be able to work out the implied meanings through knowledge" (Hatim 1997: 197). While this may work in English (and other languages) it cannot be taken as a universal principle. Hatim illustrates the disparity existing between languages by stressing that the meaning conveyed in English by means of irony tends to be rendered in a more explicit manner in languages such as Arabic (1997: 195). This variation, which depends on the features of specific texts, seems unlikely to be adequately rendered by automated translation at present, as literary context involves the communicative values of register membership, intentionality and the semiotics of intertextuality (1997: 176-177). In line with this, Hatim uses James Joyce's *The Saint's Lamp* to exemplify the importance of attitudinal discourse and intuitive feeling in order to understand the meaning of a phrase such as "dear, dirty Dublin", which aims to reflect the Joycean discourse of alienation. This phrase would require the translator to reflect on Joyce's implied meaning before deciding how to convey it in the target language.

3.2. Politeness

In the last decades of the twentieth century, pragmatics theorists paid great attention to politeness. While originally focusing on the Anglophone world (which led to the critique of universal politeness rules: for a discussion see Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010), the differences between politeness conventions in different cultures has gradually gained traction. Even within the English-speaking world, important variations exist. Cutting (2015: 30), for instance, discusses the difference between the US and the UK concerning the phrasing of requests. While in the UK speakers might say “Don’t you think it’s getting a bit chilly in here?”, American speakers tend to be more direct and say “I’m cold. Is it OK if I put the fire on?”

In addition, recent research into intercultural communication has led to the differentiation of two types of contexts: prior context and actual situational context (Kecskes 2011). Kecskes (2014) illustrates the intricacies of intercultural communication with examples such as the following one:

> Example
> A: Melody, I have received the travel grant.
> M: Nooou, get out of here!
> A: You should not be rude. I did get it.
> M: OK, I was not rude, just happy for you.

Although apparently this exchange does not involve translation, in fact A is a Japanese student that translated Melody’s expression of happiness literally (“get out of here!) and, therefore, misinterpreted its meaning. More importantly, although in the US “Get out of here!” is a formulaic expression that is used to express happiness, a different speaker in a different context may use it with a literal meaning and, therefore, convey rudeness. In addition to familiarity with this type of expressions, their correct interpretation requires knowledge of the appropriate situational context. This has important implications for translation, let alone automated translation, as it does not seem plausible that, at present, machine translation can produce target texts that combine these two types of knowledge, which do not only provide meaning but are also indicative of the relationship between the participants. In her study of im/politeness in the Greek/English language pair, Sidiropoulou (2021) has demonstrated that translation can impact the interpretation of anything from the concept of face to ideology and ethics, both in narrative works and in drama, because, as she claims, “translation can offer manifestations of the mediator’s.

negative attitudes towards behaviours occurring in specific contexts, when the translator (as mediator) disagrees with beliefs and narratives" (2021: 80). This results in targets texts that will guide the audience's interpretation in certain directions.

In connection with this, Hatim (1997) has stressed the relevance of politeness across cultures for translation practitioners. Focusing on the conventions of written texts in English and Arabic, Hatim discussed features such as distance, power, imposition and exposition, and posited that misconceptions concerning the conventions of a specific language can lead to face-threatening acts. In his view, "any transgression, unless motivated by factors such as genre and discourse or the need to communicatively efficient, would constitute an FTA" (1997: 156). Hatim exemplifies this by using an English translation of an Arabic academic text on pre-Islamic love poetry, in which the translator imposed his/her views on the target reader.

This violation of the purpose of the text is related to the social functions of politeness within specific societies (House 1998: 59-60). A comparison of German and English, for instance, shows that the former tend to be more direct, more explicit and more content-oriented than English (House 1998: 61-62). These differences should be considered when translating, as these features need to go through a "cultural filter" in order to perform a similar function in the target language. As a result, House proposed a distinction between overt and covert translation. This categorization emphasizes the fact that cross-cultural communication in different languages requires different approaches, which House illustrates by using examples where German translations appear more forceful, active and direct than the English originals (1998: 67-68). Thus, in intercultural communication, familiarity with the politeness conventions of the two cultures is crucial to make the right decisions.

Another important feature of politeness is the formal versus informal V/U second person distinction in some languages, which can be a challenge for translators. For instance, contemporary rules governing the use of German and (European) Spanish, both of which have distinct forms for the second person, do not necessarily match (Kozanda 2014). Thus, rendering the formal German "Sie" as Spanish "Usted" can be inappropriate in contexts where contemporary Spanish speakers might consider this version overformal and, possibly, unfriendly. As Kecskes (2014: 205) notes, prior knowledge and situational context are intertwined and, therefore, the combination of these two factors is more likely to produce adequate translations and, consequently, to avoid communication breakdowns and misunderstandings. The German translation of the J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books exemplify this aspect. As modern English lacks the V/U distinction, “you” is rendered as “du” or “Sie” in the German versions depending on the age and relationship of the interlocutors.

Swearing also poses challenges for translators, not to mention automated translation. O’Driscoll (2020: 5) stresses that, while taboo language can be separated from actual use, swearing cannot. Even if two languages have equivalent lexical taboo items, their force is likely to vary across languages and cultures. For instance, the connotative value of the word “cunt” in English differs considerably from its use in languages such as French, where words such as “con” and “connerie” are used in informal everyday language, and Spanish, where the word “coño” frequently appears in expressions such as “¿Qué coño es eso?” (which pragmatically can be translated as “What the hell is that?”). In contrast, it is one of the most offensive terms in the English language (McEnery 2006: 36).

This problem also applies to varieties of the same language. For instance, Latin American Spanish is far less prone to use swearwords than European Spanish where, over the past decades, the use of this type of lexis has become widespread in contexts where South American speakers and writers would avoid it. This is reflected, for instance, in a tendency to translate neutral lexical items by swearwords in audiovisual products in Spain (see, for example, the studies by Valdeón 2020, and Pavesi & Zamora 2021). This might result from the assumption that the target culture is more tolerant of this type of lexis and, therefore, target texts should use a greater number of swearwords than the source ones. In addition, decisions on the translation of swearwords may vary across time. For instance, taboo words were often eliminated or deleted in twentieth-century Spain: the 1978 Spanish version of the American novel *The Catcher in the Rye* eliminated most of the swearwords (Santaemilia 2008: 225-226).

Both the overuse and the elimination of taboo words, controversial as they may be, are unlikely to characterize automated translations at present, as these trends are informed by the ideological positioning of the translators, the commissioners and so on. Thus, they would require almost human-like machines capable of considering under which circumstances and in which contexts swearwords can be deemed acceptable (or not) in the target culture.

In the next section, I would like to consider some of the most relevant research carried out in the area of automated translation as regards the translation of pragmatic meaning.

4. Research into pragmatics and automated translation

Even though machine translation has moved from a lexis-based to a probabilistic model and more recently to a deep-learning Neural Machine Translation (Venkatesan 2021), features such as idle conversation and polite formulae have remained unexplored. In fact, despite the increase in the use of machine translated texts and the satisfactory results that automated translation can produce in many cases, there is no consensus about the benefit of using automated software to render a source text A into a target text B. For instance, in its webpage the American Translators Association (ATA) still indicates that "MT is based on probability-not meaning" and adds that "It doesn't understand the meaning or the context of what it's translating." ATA also indicates that the use of machine translation can have disastrous consequences because, they argue, although automated translation can produce fluent results, "fluency is not accuracy".

Machine translation thus poses greater problems when meaning depends largely on the context and not only on grammar and lexis. Even though the importance of incorporating nonpropositional content in an integrated knowledge representation system for natural language processing was defended as early as in 1987, when Nirenburg and Carbonell proposed a model for codification, the work done in this area has not been very productive so far. More recently other authors have attempted to study pragmatic issues in machine translation systems. For example, Stede and Schmitz (2000) have analyzed the challenges posed by the translation into English of German spoken language particles that convey attitudes on the part of the speaker rather than propositional content. For their part, Guessoum and Zantout have delved into English-Arabic MT systems and, although they claim that "analyzing the contextual disambiguation quality of an MT system" is crucial (2005: 325), the fact remains that the focus of their study is mainly grammatical.

Farwell and Helmreich (2015) have posited that pragmatics-based machine translation depends on reasoning to determine the implications of speech acts, and propose a model called PGMT (Pragmatics-based machine translation) to establish the role of participants in the translation process. This model is based on the study of three types of context to interpret source language utterances and to produce target versions, namely a context of the utterance with "nested beliefs environments which are constructed and modified through ascription during processing" (2015: 167), a discourse context consisting of acknowledge base and a context-sensitive inferencing within the context to resolve ambiguities. Interestingly, Farwell and Helmreich, who used a corpus of 125 Spanish news articles and their translation into English, discussed the importance of conventions such as systems of measurement and lexical choices such as the use of English "kill", "murder" and "assassinate" for the Spanish "asesinar", and stressed the need to incorporate the beliefs of the source and target audiences as well as the purpose of the translation in the decision-making process (2015: 180).

Nothing new in this respect. In fact, the "kill/murder/assassinate" versus "asesinar" example might illustrate the validity of a probabilistic approach as the use of any of these words might be correct considering the (typically written) contexts in which it is normally used. However, because all these factors do indeed require attention on the part of the translator, Farwell and Helmreich conclude that much needs to be done to produce reasonably accurate translations. Indeed, they claim that challenges "are found both in the representation of linguistic phenomena and knowledge of the world as well as in the modeling of the translation process and the implementation of various crucial components" (2015: 182).

Farwell and Helmreich had begun working on the incorporation of pragmatics into machine translation in the 1990s. In fact, in 1998 they proposed what they called a "pragmatics-based approach to Machine Translation" (Helmreich and Farwell 1998: 17). Starting from the assumption that translation is governed by interpretation rather than meaning, they suggested that context was a prerequisite to avoid some of the errors and problems identified in their analysis of a news text and two translations. Although Farwell and Helmreich have subsequently developed the initial proposal, the fact remains that the advances in this respect have been relatively small: the chapter referenced above (Farwell & Helmreich 2015) is part of *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Technology* and is the only one out of a total of forty-two that addresses the challenges posed by the translation of pragmatic meaning in automated translation. This points to the complexity of this crucial aspect of language when resorting to translation technologies.

Another attempt at incorporating the pragmatic component of language worth mentioning is the work carried out by Yorick Wilks. Wilks, who has stressed the role that "a realistic pragmatics" programme (2009: 121) should have in machine translation, emphasizes that researchers should focus on commonsense semantic approaches, by which he refers to speech acts, reference treatment and stylistic notions as elements that can improve the quality of the translation. Interestingly, he casts doubts over the fact that utterances such as "It's sweltering hot in here" can be interpreted as "I should open the window for the last speaker right now" (2009: 137). This does not prevent him from devoting a full chapter to a discussion of "What would pragmatics-based machine translation be like?" if only to conclude that important limitations exist in order to convey pragmatic meaning via machine translation. He also believes that the very little existing data on human pragmatics acquired automatically "is perhaps only because few people have looked for it" (2009: 233). It is worth mentioning that Wilks speaks about "human" pragmatics as opposed to other types of pragmatics, which are not specifically mentioned.

Also of notice is the fact that the work carried out by these researchers focuses on informative texts rather than literary texts, which further problematizes the applicability of machine translation in literary translation, where the aesthetic or expressive component is of the utmost importance.

5. Intercultural pragmatics, recontextualization and (automated) translation

In the final part of this article, I would like to suggest that any data involving "human pragmatics" for translation purposes needs to be able to account for intercultural differences. For this reason, I will draw on some of the concepts that Istvan Kecskes, the main proponent of intercultural pragmatics, has discussed in recent years, and the challenges they pose for automated translation, i. e. interculturality, formulaic language use, context, and politeness, as well as on Juliane House's concept of recontextualization.

Kecskes (2014: 81) emphasizes that the notion of culture has fuzzy boundaries, characterized by their dynamic nature, both diachronically and synchronically. The diachronic evolution of pragmatic force is particularly relevant for automated translation, as shown above. Let us return to the V/U distinction for a while. Whereas contemporary English does not make that distinction any more, other European languages such as French, Spanish and German still do. In principle, we might assume that this difference is relatively stable: the context in which those forms are uttered or written might provide sufficient clues so as to decide whether the pronoun "you" should be rendered as "Vous" or "tu" in French, for example taking into account the fact that the speakers in an English novel might use titles when addressing each other. Conversely, if no titles are used, the specific context of the exchange may provide relevant information, e. g. in French a student-teacher conversation would require the use of formal "Vous". As Kecskes (2014: 82) posits, knowledge (or, to use his terminology, encyclopedic knowledge) contributes thus to the interpretation of the situation and, therefore, will help speakers (or translators) to respond adequately. However, as mentioned above, in the translation of the *Harry Potter* series into German, other factors were taken into account to render "you" as "du" or "Sie", such as the age of the school children.

Therefore, the study of intercultural differences is of great importance for human translators because the participants in conversations are influenced by their own cultural and linguistic conventions. For example, House has noted that Germans do not particularly enjoy small talk (House 2010: 570). Although this may be interpreted as impolite in other languages, translators need to consider differences such as this when translating English fictive dialogue into German. House exemplifies this by quoting the German version of *A Bear Called Paddington* by Michael Bond, where the following exchange was omitted altogether: "'Hallo Mrs Bird,' said Judy 'It's nice to see you again. How's the rheumatism?' 'Worse than it's ever been' began Mrs Bird". According to House, this exchange was simply considered unnecessary or irrelevant in German.

To understand the complexity of intercultural communication, we can draw on Kecskes, who suggests that our encyclopedic knowledge depends on frames (or preconceived understandings of a new situation) as well as on scripts (activities that we associate with a particular situation) and scenarios (or components we anticipate in a situation) (2014: 83). In sum, various factors need to be considered to adequately render the pragmatic force of a stretch of language that is part of a text (written or oral in a specific context) into a target language, however close the two languages may be.

Another important aspect in Kecskes's study of intercultural pragmatics is "formulaic language use" (2014: 105-127). Here it is important to highlight the word "use" because it refers to the linguistic creativity of speakers and writers, which, as Kecskes (2014: 107) argues, implies more than combining words in an effective way. This poses problems for non-human translation: creativity depends not only on grammar, lexical choices, functional adequacy and style, but also on situational appropriateness. Although research has shown that formulaic language is statistically recurrent, human intervention is necessary to decide the contexts in which this type of language is appropriate. The following example illustrates this problem:

> Example
>
> Lee: Could you sign this document for me, please?
>
> Clerk: Come again
>
> Lee: Why should I come again? I am here now (Kecskes 2014: 110)

Although this exchange serves Kecskes to underscore the problems between native and non-native speakers of English, it also useful to highlight the importance of human agency in the translation of formulaic language *in use*: here the Korean student interpreted the formulaic expression “Come again” as a freely generated expression with general meaning. While this is indeed a possibility, the context or situational appropriateness, as Kecskes puts it, typically allows proficient speakers to draw on their prior knowledge and, therefore, infer the intended meaning. It is uncertain that automated translation will, at least in all cases, generate the right target version. Turning to literary translation, Clifford E. Landers (2001: 110) discusses an example that illustrates the use of formulaic language and, more precisely, the difficulty he faced when translating the phrase “tudo azul” (that is, “all blue”) in Patrícia Melo’s novel *Inferno* from Portuguese into English. Ordinarily this expression would not pose a problem but, given the situational context, it demanded a great effort to convey the intended meaning: in the novel, “tudo azul” refers to the blue doors in Rio’s shanty towns, where the colour indicates that certain houses are safe from the police. Landers acknowledges that he was unable to find an expression that could retain both the flavour and meaning of the original, so he opted for a translation that, at least, reflected the meaning. It is unlikely that an automated translation could have considered the various factors involved in the transfer in order to facilitate communication.

With regards to context in the production of formulaic language, we could turn to Juliane House’s theory of translation as recontextualization (2016: 64-65). For this theory to be valid, she claims, three criteria must be met: the theory has to acknowledge the fact that the source and target texts relate to different contexts, it has to reflect the changes necessary in the act of recontextualization in the metalanguage used to describe the translation process, and it has to relate features of the source text and features of the translation to one another and to their contexts. One of the key concepts in House’s model is the so-called “cultural filter”, a term she first proposed in the 1970s. House posits that this notion captures (or attempts to capture) socio-cultural differences, incorporating the function of the target texts. In her view, the function of a text will eventually determine the type of translation: overt and covert. In the case of covert translations, translators need to consider the specificity of the target audience in order to make important modifications. For example, children’s literature may require substantial adaptations in translation, which will need to consider the pragmatic effect upon the readership and the conventions of the target culture, as discussed above.

In line with this, translators tend to rely on presuppositions about the source and target cultures. House (1977: 301) uses the translation of a tourist brochure about Nuremberg to exemplify her point. The original text speaks about “die Zeit des Meistergesanges, die Zeit des Schuhmachers und Meistersingers Hans Sachs”, whereas the English text adds “their best-known representative” before Hans Sachs to stress the importance of this person in this context. The German text does not require this information as the writers presuppose prior knowledge on the part of the readers. In contrast, the English translation presupposes the lack of prior knowledge. This is reminiscent of Malmkjaer’s literary example: the translator added the phrase “summer house” to ensure that the English target readers understood what the location of the plot meant for Danish readers. Both examples are relevant for the current discussion as they exemplified the problems that human translators of these text types may come across: their function requires a careful consideration of the source and target cultures to successfully achieve their goal, i.e. to attract tourists to specific destinations and to allow the readers of a literary text to grasp the significance of a specific place. Thus, pragmatic concepts such as presupposition, implicature and inference are of paramount importance.

6. Final remarks

Bearing the above in mind, it seems unlikely that, at present, automated translation will be capable of conveying all the pragmatic nuances and implications of a source text. While the existence of diverse and sophisticated software material can indeed assist human translation, machine translation cannot replace human translators/editors, not only as regards style and register (House 2016: 82-83) but also concerning crucial pragmatic concepts such as those mentioned above. Failure to take those notions into consideration is likely to create, to say the least, communication problems with the target audiences. A cursory look at the contents of the journal *Machine Translation* demonstrates that much needs to be done in this respect. Most of the articles that claimed to investigate the automated translation of the pragmatic features of texts were published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and, for the most part, focused on language issues.

Another interesting aspect that needs to be considered with regards to automated translation is the translator’s ethical responsibility, on which an important bulk of research has been published. However, much needs to be said about the commissioner's ethical responsibility, which starts with the need to publish materials that are not merely presented as versions of an A language in a B language, but which fail to fulfill the most basic criteria to communicate accurate semantic content. As the American Translators Association still maintains, "fluency is not accuracy". Automated translation can produce reasonably good texts in certain cases, but human intervention remains vital in most text typologies, especially when precision is required and when the creativity of human translation is necessary to maintain the semantic implications and aesthetic value of the source texts, as illustrated by the examples of literary texts discussed by Malmkjaer and House.

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