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Intercultural pragmatics meets translation: Intercultural competence revisited from the perspective of pragmatics

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Introduction

This article discusses the notion of intercultural competence in the context of translation studies (TS) and suggests that the paradigm of cultural scripts can help to explore translation students' intercultural competence and its development. We focus on this key concept rooted in Intercultural Communication Studies (ICS) from the perspective of intercultural pragmatics in an attempt to re-conceptualize it within the framework of applied translation studies and translator training. Despite of the fact, that both disciplines operate within the general framework of communication and hence share certain assumptions about intercultural competence, they are concerned with different kinds of communication. Whereas Intercultural Communication Studies involved with direct communication between members belonging to different cultures and speaking different languages, translation studies deals with mediated communication, which differs considerably from the communicative interaction in a foreign-language-learning context or a *lingua franca* setting. From the viewpoint of pragmatics, translation can be understood as a cross-cultural communication event which takes place through the mediation of a third person, the translator, who is engaged in the complex task of producing a target text for a target receiver that fulfils a definite purpose under specific conditions and given circumstances. In order to perform the task of enabling

communicative interaction between interlocutors who do not share a common language, the translator is supposed to possess expert knowledge and skills in conveying messages across linguistic and cultural barriers, the so called translation competence.

Undeniably, translation competence is one of the most controversially discussed notions in translation studies[1], and during the last decades research in this field has put forth a variety of approaches which according to Pym (2003) map on a continuum that ranges from "competence as no such thing" to "competence as just one thing" and includes "competence as a summation of linguistic competences" as well as "competence as multi-componential" construct. We shall not dwell further on the question of the precise nature of translation competence, within the scope of this contribution it will suffice to adopt Weinert's (2001:45) definition of competence as a "specialized system of abilities, proficiencies or skills that are necessary or sufficient to reach a specific goal" and to argue that irrespective of whether translation competence is conceptualized as *multi-componential* or as a *super-competence* which coordinates a set of different sub-competences, there are a variety of capacities and aptitudes and at play when performing a translation task: cognitive, metacognitive, behavioral-procedural, linguistic, interactional, pragmatic, cultural and intercultural aspects. Since translation involves not only different languages, but also diverse cultural settings, the quality of the translator's performance also depends strongly on his intercultural knowledge and abilities. Hence, intercultural competence is an important notion in translation studies, but its importance is by no means limited to this specific type of mediated communicative interaction across cultural boundaries. Moreover, intercultural competence is a key issue in Intercultural Communication Studies (ICS), where the notion is conceptualized within the framework of second-language learning and training and the focus is generally set on the specific communication needs of professionals in intercultural settings.

1   For a critical discussion of translation competence see Lesznyák (2007), Rothe-Neves (2007), Pym (2003) and Orozco & Hurtado (2002).

Intercultural competence in Intercultural Communication Studies

As research in the field of Intercultural Communication Studies is undertaken from a multiplicity of frameworks and approaches, there is – as Sincrope, Norris and Watanabe point out – a persisting lack of conceptual clarity with regard to intercultural competence, which sometimes is used interchangeably with *intercultural communicative competence* or *intercultural sensitivity*. From the perspective of Hammer, Bennet, and Wiseman (2003) the latter refers to "the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences", whereas the former represents "the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways". These scholars draw a clear distinction between the cognitive and the procedural traits of intercultural competence which is, in our view, essential to this notion. With regard to the lack of agreement on intercultural competence, Wiseman (2001:207) notes that intercultural competence "has been investigated in studies with such diverse conceptual foci as sojourner adjustment, immigrant acculturation, intergroup contact, culture shock, cross-cultural training, social change, international management, and foreign student advising", so that it proves difficult to reach a consensus, despite the increasing conceptual overlap among the broad range of approaches to understanding and investigating intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence being a multifaceted and complex notion, it is worth mentioning briefly the three major models for conceptualizing it: component models, interactional models and developmental models. Component models tend to group competences together by areas of ability, the categories knowledge (cognitive dimension), attitudes (affective dimension) and skills (behavioral dimension) being the most common.[2] Interaction models, however, focus on the interactive nature of intercultural

2   See i.e. Byram (1997), Chen & Starosta (1996), Fantini (2000).

competence and inquire about the impact variables. Finally, developmental models depict the development of intercultural competence from the initial stage of incompetence and clarify that intercultural competence is never something pre-determined, but rather it is developed with effort over a period of time.

It is not our aim to provide an in-depth analysis of these models, but with regard to the translator's intercultural competence, the issue we are dealing with here, there are two aspects which should be emphasized: first, the existence of a cognitive, affective and behavioral dimension and the developmental nature of intercultural competence, which allows for instruction and training.

With respect to the translator's intercultural competence, Fantini's definition of intercultural competence as "the complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself "(Fantini, 2006:12) is of particular interest. According to Fantini "effective" reflects the outsider's view of the host culture and "appropriate" relates to how the performance is perceived by the members of the host culture, in terms of adequacy to the norms and conventions of the host culture.

Furthermore, Fantini (2006:2) establishes that intercultural competence encompasses multiple components, including the following:

1. A variety of personal traits and characteristics (flexibility, humor, patience, openness, interest, curiosity, empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, and suspending judgment, etc.)
2. Three areas or domains
   - the ability to establish and maintain relationships
   - the ability to communicate with minimal loss or distortion
   - the ability to collaborate in order to accomplish something of mutual interest or need
3. Four dimensions
   - knowledge
   - (positive) attitudes/affect

   - skills, and
   - awareness
4. Proficiency in the host language
5. Varying levels of attainment throughout a longitudinal and developmental process

Even though Fantini's model of ICC is conceived within the framework of foreign language and intercultural training programs, it is perfectly applicable to translation as will be shown later.

Translation: a specific kind of intercultural communication

It goes without saying that intercultural communication and translation are related activities that share certain features and principles. If we conceive intercultural communication as a specific type of communicative interaction between interlocutors of different cultures, translation may be subsumed under the broader notion of intercultural communication. When members of different cultural communities engage in intercultural communication, they are involved in one the following scenarios: the interlocutors use a shared lingua franca, one of the interlocutors communicates in his L2 giving his communication partner the opportunity to use his native language or, both use their native language and communicate with the help of a translator or an interpreter. As Schäffner (2003:91) points out, the significant difference between engaging in intercultural communication as a translator and acting as a foreign language interlocutor is that the latter acts on his own behalf and therefore "requires an intercultural communicative competence for independent acting" and "a competence to accompany and support" the main objective of his communicative interaction. The translator, for his part, is

concerned with "a specific kind of artificially and professionally enabled communication" (Schäffner, 2003: 91). He acts on behalf of others and therefore he finds himself in a double-bind situation, where he has to achieve a given communication goal (that of the source text) within its source cultural context by means of a target text that achieves the communication goal and conforms to the cultural norms and conventions of the target culture, that is to say, by transforming the source-text features in order to meet the requirements of the target culture. Thus, the translator has to be faithful – or as Nord (1991) puts it- *loyal* to the both communication partners: the source-text sender and the target-text addressee. Given the difference between natural communication in a foreign language setting and translation as a mediated form of communication, Schäffner (2003:91–93) advocates for a "translational intercultural competence", drawing on Witte (2000:163), who developed a definition of translation-specific cultural competence which reads as follows:

> „Die Fähigkeit des Sich-Bewusstmachens und Überprüfens und unbewusst Gewusstem' und die Fähigkeit des bewussten ,Erlernens' von ,Nicht-Gewusstem' in Eigen-und Fremdkultur(en) sowie die Fähigkeit des vergleichenden InBezug-Setzens dieser Kulturen zum Zweck der ziel- und situationsadäquaten Rezeption und Produktion von Verhalten für den Bedarf von mindestens zwei Aktanten aus zwei verschiedenen Kulturen zur Herstellung von Kommunikation zwischen diesen Aktanten".[3]

Witte's definition of translation-specific cultural competence falls in line with Fantini's components of intercultural competence: the ability to become aware of the unconsciously known, the skill to consciously learn, i.e. to acquire knowledge of the native and the foreign culture, the ability to establish relationships between different cultures and the ability to collaborate in order

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3   Format of the quotation as in the original.

to accomplish something of mutual interest or need, that is, to enable communication.

Hence, if translation is regarded as an act of mediated communication in which a source text is produced for addressees in one particular cultural setting is rendered for target addressees in another cultural setting, translators have to relate source and target culture in order to scrutinize the source text for culture-specific features and develop strategies to solve the resulting translation problems in order to adopt an adequate mediating position that satisfies the participants of the communicative process. Wherefore it follows that translational intercultural competence is not the sum of competencies in two or more cultures, the source-culture and the target cultures, rather it is the awareness of the similarities and differences between cultures. Intercultural awareness is of particular importance due to the fact that cultural similarities tend to foster successful communication through positive transfer, whereas cultural differences may result in negative cultural transfer and give rise to misunderstanding if the translator is unaware of them.

Translational intercultural competence

The foregoing considerations regarding the conception of intercultural competence in ICS and TS, and the characterization of translation as professionally enabled intercultural communication that satisfies the cultural expectations of target addressees coalesce around the question of what is to be understood by translational intercultural competence. In what respect is it different from the concept used in Intercultural Communication Studies?

Building on Weinert's (2001:45) definition of competence as a "specialized *system of abilities*, proficiencies or skills that are necessary or sufficient to reach a *specific goal*", we argue that translational intercultural competence cannot be conceived separately

translation competence, which includes linguistic, domain-specific, encyclopaedic, cultural, textual, transfer, meta-cognitive, socio-professional, documentation and research, terminological and technological competences.[4] Furthermore, we assume that *translational intercultural competence* comprises cognitive (knowledge about the respective linguacultures), attitudinal (to take into account other values, beliefs and behaviors and to be willing to relativize oneself in order to act on behalf of another) and procedural aspects (awareness of cultural similarities and differences, skill to relate the different cultures, ability to identify culture-specific features and to select and deploy effectively problem-solving strategies in order to attain the intended communicative goal). Finally, translational intercultural competence is not innate, but it is acquired through a developmental process which can be enhanced through training. As already mentioned above this conception of translational intercultural matches perfectly well with the categories proposed by Fantini (2006), as illustrated in the table below:

Intercultural competence (Fantini)	Translational intercultural competence
Domains:	
The ability to establish and maintain relationships	The ability to establish and maintain relationships between the source-text sender, the commissioner of the translation, the target-addressee and the translator himself
The ability to communicate with minimal loss or distortion	The ability to convey the message and attain the intended the communicative goal
The ability to collaborate in order to accomplish something of mutual interest or need	The ability to enable communication in a professional way and to satisfy the communication needs according to the prevailing cultural expectations.

4   The development of textual, documentation and terminological competences have been discussed more thoroughly in Schnell and Rodriguez (2003, 2005, 2006, 2008).

Intercultural competence (Fantini)	Translational intercultural competence
Dimensions	
Knowledge	Knowledge about the respective linguacultures (factual knowledge about the source and target cultures, including knowledge about traditions, social practices, values, beliefs, etc.)
(positive) Attitudes/affect	The ability to take into account values, beliefs behaviors and expectations of the communications partners and to stand aside in order to act on behalf of another person.
skills	The ability to scrutinize the source-text for culture-specific features, identify them and deploy the necessary strategies to convey them in an adequate way.
Awareness	The awareness of similarities and dissimilarities in the respective source and target cultures.
Proficiency in the host language	Linguistic competence of source and target language that encompasses the ability to discern the linguistic resources employed in order to attain a communicative goal.
Varying levels of attainment throughout a longitudinal and developmental process (Level I to IV)	Translational intercultural competence is gradually developed in the course of training At the end of this developmental process a professional competence level is envisaged.

Translation meets (intercultural) pragmatics

The realization that emerges from the reflections up to this point is that translation activity is pragmatic in nature in so far as it entails the rendering of a source text in order to fulfill a specific purpose

and achieve a specific communicative goal, or as Emery (2004:146) puts it, "translating is the rendering of an SL texts pragmatic meaning into a TL text in line with TL expectancy norms."

Consequently, there is an obvious link between translation and pragmatics: they both are concerned with achieving communicative goals and bringing about changes in the knowledge, beliefs and/or behavior of the addressee. The main difference is that pragmatics traditionally is focused on spoken utterances in conversational interaction, whereas translation concentrates on written discourse. This difference notwithstanding, translation studies has greatly benefited by applying insights from pragmatics. As Hickey (1998:4) asserts in his introduction to the volume *The Pragmatics of Translation*, pragmatics provides useful insights into translation as "pragmatic approaches to translation attempt to explain translation – procedure, process and product- from the point of view of what is (potentially) done by the original author in or by the text, what is (potentially) done in the translation as response to the original, how and why it is done in that way in that context". Subsequently, pragmatic studies of translation address questions such as by means of which pragmatic devices intended communicative goals are achieved in source and target texts, how cooperation, relevance or politeness is dealt with, or how presuppositions and implicatures are transferred in the target text.

From the perspective of a pragmatics-based model of the translation process, translation begins with the translator identifying the intention of the author of the source text on the basis of what the translator knows about source culture, source language conventions, cultural and social norms and about the source text addressees presumed world knowledge. Secondly, the translator, engaged in a 'double negotiation' (Emery, 2004:150), relates the source culture and the target culture, in order to convey the pragmatic function of the source text according to the expectancy norms of the target culture.

From the field of pragmatics are recently arising new theoretical approaches such as intercultural pragmatics which, according

to Kecskes (2010a) is "about how the language system is put to use in social encounters between human beings who have different first languages, communicate in a common language, and, usually, represent different cultures." Even though in translation there is no such common language, intercultural pragmatics, may illuminate translational action because it supports the view that interculturality relies on cultural norms and models as well as on situationally emerging aspects and thus provides a framework that accounts for variations in translation which arise from differences in participants' (translator, commissioner, source-text sender and target-text addressee) beliefs about the object and the objective of the communicative interaction. Kecskes' (2010a) assertion about intercultural discourse as an instance of "transformation rather than transmission of knowledge" equally holds true for translation.

Another theoretical paradigm rooted in ethnopragmatics which we consider of major relevance for translation is the cultural scripts approach, for it is able to account for the cultural shaping of speech practices and provides an apparatus for analyzing and understanding these practices and the underlying cultural norms form a culture-internal perspective by using Wierzbicka's semantic meta-language approach (NSM) based on a core of interculturally shared meanings, the so called semantic primes which are linked to specific linguistic expressions in all languages. The cultural scripts technique proves to be very useful in translator training because raises intercultural awareness among the students and helps them to develop their translation competence.

Raising intercultural awareness in translator training

The rationale for the cultural scripts approach is that translation students are confronted with a variety of translation problems which are related to cultural scripts and which are often ignored

and remain unnoticed unless awareness is increased. There are translation problems that arise from the differences in cultural scripts, as for instance the Anglo cultural script of avoiding "strong directives" (Goddard, 2006:7), a cultural script which is not endorsed in the same way by members of the Spanish culture, translation problems that originate from cultural scripts which are specific to a culture and cannot be found in other cultures, as for example the Korean script for a vertical model of society which become manifest in speech styles and a complex honorification system (Goddard, 2006:14) and finally translation problems that derive from cultural scripts which recur in different cultures, but differ cross-culturally in terms of their linguistic realization.

Cultural scripts help translation students to differentiate between culture-specific and culturally shared understandings and discourse practices, enhancing their intercultural awareness and thereby improving their translational intercultural competence. We believe that this approach should find its place in translator training as it invites students to reflect on the understanding of both the source and the target culture and thus fosters the development of metacognitive strategies which ultimately contribute to a competent and successful professional performance.

Conclusion

In this contribution we have attempted to approach intercultural competence, the influential notion in Intercultural Communication Studies, from the perspective of translation, highlighting the similarities and differences in the way it is conceptualized in ICS and TS and we have aimed to show that the concept reflects the changes and challenges of intercultural research in its broadest sense. In translation studies, the notion expands the situation in which intercultural communication takes place, incorporating the specific

case of professionally enabled or mediated communication which makes it necessary to introduce the modified concept of translational intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is furthermore a notion that requires drawing from other disciplines and we purport that intercultural pragmatics and ethnopragmatics are suitable to explore interculturality and to raise intercultural awareness among translation students.

Acknowlededgements

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