

WRITTEN AND ORAL TRANSLATION CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN KOSOVO

Lirak KARJAGDIU * & Seniha KRASNIQI **

* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina,
KOSOVO, e-mail: lirak.karjagdiu@uni-pr.edu
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8372-2372>

** (Corresponding author) Ass. Prof. Dr., University of Prishtina, Faculty of Filology,
KOSOVO e-mail: seniha.krasniqi@uni-pr.edu
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9737-8429>

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that thousands of people nowadays work and earn their living from translation and/ or interpreting, the widely spread opinion is that one does not need any special training in order to become a translator or an interpreter. Nevertheless, people who deal with translation and interpreting are aware that this assumption does not hold. The fact that translation is not just a linguistic procedure but is socially constructed and oriented just like language itself, is gradually accepted. Hence, translators are becoming fully aware that training is necessary just as in any other profession if one wants to keep up with global changes. One of the major challenges in translation and interpretation in Kosovo is the inadequate translation quality of texts as well as poor simultaneous and consecutive interpreting during conferences, training, and other important events. However, in the case of written translations, the translator has the chance to intervene, correct, and proofread the text through proofreaders, which is not a touch that can be done during oral interpretation. This does not mean that interpretation has any lower stakes; poor oral interpretation can even result in the failure of an event, e.g. interlocutors may misunderstand each other or convey an inaccurate intellectual or professional picture of the speakers. Therefore, this paper explores the challenges and solutions of translation in Kosovo, in general, and oral interpretation, in particular.

Key words: translation, challenges and problems, solutions, culture, training

1. INTRODUCTION

In the world of interdependencies and integrations in which our country fully participates and strives to have its share, the necessity and demand for translation is in constant increase. In order to address that increased demand, a vast number of people are daily engaged in translation/ interpretation. Thanks to translation, the exchange of goods between social communities divided by language barriers was made easier. This way, owing to translation, contacts between individuals and nations have been established. These contacts would otherwise be impossible under conditions of language isolation. Since translation (or rather interpreting) has its roots deep in the history of mankind, there is a wide and abundant literature related to translation. However, to date, there have been no significant and comprehensive papers or studies written regarding written translation and oral interpretation challenges and solutions in Kosovo. This is clearly a vacuum that needs filling, especially given the fact that translation has had a role of great significance throughout the history of Kosovo. Thus this paper will focus on the history of translation and on the role cultural differences play in translation, in general, and more specifically on the problems and solutions of inadequate translation quality of texts as well as poor simultaneous and consecutive interpreting during conferences, training and other important events in Kosovo.

2. THE HISTORY OF TRANSLATION AND THE ROLE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN TRANSLATION

The invention of the printing press incited and encouraged the development of translation activity. After the advent of the printing press, terms related to translation were used for the first time, terms which are even nowadays in use. In 1593, the word *traduire* (to translate) was born, while in 1540, Etienne Dolet created and included the words *traduction* (translation) and *traducteur* (translator) in one of his tracts. In Spain and Italy, the neologisms *traducer/traduccion* (Spain) and *tradurre/traduzione* were similarly created to describe translation.

As a matter of fact, translation is one of the earliest forms of human activities. It is older than writing. However, written translation dates back to the very beginning of written language itself, when the first official documents and materials (i.e., related to trade exchange, religious texts) were translated. Thus, translation ever since its inception has played an important social and cultural role: it enabled people to become acquainted with the cultural values of different nations. Only through translation, could the masterpieces of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, Dostoyevsky, Cervantes, Tolstoy, Byron, Pushkin, etc., become cultural treasures of the entirety of humanity.

According to linguists, translation has been defined as “the replacement of textual material in one language (Source Language) by equivalent textual material in another language (Target Language)” (Catford, 1969:23). The translation is thus a rendering, transformation, or transmission of a message from one language into another. While, according to Eugene A. Nida “translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style ” (Catford, 1969: 20).

Nevertheless, in addition to knowing source/target languages and being familiar with the relevant cultural contexts, the translator must have a solid foundation in philology, which has been seen as a necessary prerequisite for the successful translation since ancient times. The study of philology dates back to the Alexandrine age of Ancient Greece when Greek scientists and scholars were tasked with collecting and deciding which texts, books, and masterpieces of national literature should be translated, annotated, and accompanied by explanations. The philological approach starts from two texts in two different languages taking into consideration not linguistically defined expressive elements, but rather literary defined elements. Hence,

translation is defined as a procedure in which a literary text is replaced by another literary text in a different language, preserving the artistic, aesthetic, and literary values of the original text.

According to George Mounin, apart from possessing excellent knowledge of the language of both source language and target language, a truly professional translator should be able to act as a mediator between nations and cultures. This means that a translator must have an excellent knowledge of both the source and target languages and cultures. Because the translation is not only an interaction between two languages, but also between two cultures, the translator must be informed about the historical, linguistic, and cultural context of the languages in which he/she translates. Hence, recent studies have paid particular attention to the translator's competence and knowledge with respect to culture. Although there have been debates regarding whether language is part of a culture, translation practice has demonstrated that language and culture are inextricably linked. Eugene Albert Nida believes that cultural differences may, in fact, pose more translation challenges than differences between languages. Moreover, he explains that cultural parallels may lead to mutual understanding, regardless of formal differences in translation; therefore, per Nida, the cultural component of translation is of the same importance as the lexical component.

The phraseology of nations—each with different customs, traditions, spiritual contexts, etc., which are often uniquely enshrined in spoken and written language—cannot always be reflected and found in dictionaries. That is why the translator often has to spend quite some time in the country where the source and target languages are used in order to become more deeply acquainted with the text's linguistic-cultural context. Only then will he/she be able to effectively overcome many of the aforementioned obstacles in translation.

It is important to emphasize that translation has played a paramount role in the development of the Albanian language, literature, and culture throughout history. This was noted by a distinguished Albanian translator and critic Agron Tufa: “Albanian language is the ‘protagonist’ and the determining element of our national identity, for it unravelled its existence for the first time through translation of Formula e Pagëzimit (Baptism Formula) “Atit e t’birit e t’shpirtit shenjt” (In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit). Ever since then, the Albanian language has developed and stood all the tests of time by ensuring and demonstrating clear evidence of its identity. One of the main secrets of the survival of the Albanian language was no doubt translation. The role of translation, as for all other languages of small nations, was crucial for the development of Albanian language. It has enabled and ensured its revival, expansion of vocabulary, its enhancement, and advancement until it became fully self-confident” (Ymeri, 2015 :42).

3. WRITTEN TRANSLATION PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS IN KOSOVO

Never before have there been so many people engaged in translation activities as there are today. Every day, thousands of translators and interpreters facilitate human communication in the social, political, cultural, artistic, scientific spheres between institutions and individuals of different nations. The role of interpreters and translators in the development of international relations, economics, arts, movies, and scientific exchange is truly enormous (Newmark, p. 10). In the current age, one cannot imagine the organization, proper functioning, and success of any conference, summit, congress, symposium, or meeting, be it in the international, scientific, political, diplomatic or cultural realms, without the participation, involvement, engagement, and noble mission of interpreters and translators. Thus, translation has become not merely a condition for two-way communication, but also a symbol and tool of progress, co-operation, mutual understanding, tolerance, and peace (Prunç, 2005: 12).

Recently in Kosovo, scores of young translation experts have been engaged and hired for interpretation or translation work. They are not only employed by international bodies such KFOR, UNMIK, OSCE, and EULEX but also work with liaison, diplomatic, economic, tourist,

political, and marketing offices; embassies, agencies, and institutions; and various humanitarian, health, educational and cultural organizations. In translating such organizational, institutional, legislative, scientific, and cultural information into Albanian and other regional languages, these translators and interpreters are at the same time helping foster amity, cooperation, mutual understanding between individuals and nations.

However, nowadays in Kosovo, one major challenge is the inadequate translation quality of texts, administrative notes, brochures, etc., as well as poor simultaneous and consecutive interpretation during conferences, training, and other important events at the national and international level. It is important to mention that there are three main kinds of translations of written texts: 1) translation of documentary, informative and scientific materials; 2) translation of journalistic, political and philosophical materials; and 3) translation of literature, prose, and poetry.

“Translation and interpretation in Kosova before the war in 1999 had only been practiced by a few talented and experienced practitioners; after the war, however, due to the sudden, extraordinary need for translation, the skill is being practiced “by those who are in need and those who do it indeed,” Vedat Kokona puts it. He makes a distinction between those who translate for financial reasons and those who he says have the call of “Mother Nature”. For Kokona, “Mother Nature” is the talent or gift for translation: the passion to read, understand, adopt and transmit a text, a message, an idea, an opinion into a clear, lucid, and original manner. On the other hand, translators in need, as Kokona explains, are those not assigned by the “Call of Nature” to work on something and as a result, they cannot do their job effectively; the result is that their shoddy work can sometimes appear comical, and the other times result in important and potentially dangerous mistakes. This type of translator possesses no gift or talent, preparation, motivation, or qualification; in their idleness, they believe that interpretation is a simple, straightforward task and as such, they do not accomplish their task aright. They annihilate not only the text and message, but also the style, and thereby misinform the reader and/or listener.

According to Edmond Tupja, a well-known Albanian scholar and translation theorist, there are two categories of interpreters in addition to those described by Kokona: sub-interpreters and pseudo-interpreters. According to Tupja, “the first one is accountable, modest, hardworking and give their best, but they lack talent and as a result, their translations/interpretations are mediocre and need to be retranslated by another translator, so the proof-reader finds himself in the position of co-translator. The second of these, the pseudo-interpreter, is like Kokona’s “translator in need”—a translator who has no gift, knowledge or wish to work. Unfortunately, this category of translators “is most commonly engaged in written and electronic media, and even in literary translations” (Tupja, 2003: 61-62).

Therefore, the translation should never be done literally. It should rather reflect the meaning and preserve the stylistic subtleties of the original. Even St. Jeronimo (Shen Jeronimi) (347-420) from Dalmacia in Illyria and Cicero emphasised the fact that a translation should never be done word-for-word, but meaning-for-meaning. For a successful translator, recognizing the meaning of the words is necessary, but not sufficient for fully understanding a text. Similarly, semantic ambiguity is a common challenge translators face; the selection of one or another potential translation of a word is determined by the meaning the word has in the textual context of the sentence, paragraph, chapter, or work as a whole. It also depends on a professional translator’s knowledge of the source/target languages and cultural context and his/her ability to understand the author’s thoughts, ideas, opinions, style, intentions, etc.

Hence, in order for a translator to translate a text, he/she has to first find the best possible way to decode its meaning. This means that he/she has to think and reflect about it until he/she finds the most accurate, clearest, and best way to transmit it into another language. Depending

on the difficulty of the text, this can sometimes prove to be very hard and even the best dictionaries may not be of much help to the translator. Therefore, his/her vocabulary and thorough knowledge of the relevant language and culture is paramount to his/her success.

4. ORAL TRANSLATION/ INTERPRETATION CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN KOSOVO

The mission of the translator/interpreter is to help individuals and groups understand each other and even help facilitate an agreement between different parties. However, above all, the translator/interpreter's paramount duty is to understand the original message, translate it, and effectively articulate it in the target language.

The two main types (techniques) of oral and verbal interpretation are simultaneous and consecutive interpretation. In consecutive translation, the translator/interpreter translates after the speaker pauses to give the interpreter time to translate and transmit the message, idea, thought, or sentence; in simultaneous translation, translation is done simultaneously, with the interpreter only a few words behind the speaker. In the latter type of oral translation, the speaker speaks and is often almost unaware that he is being translated. Since the translator speaks at the same time as the speaker, he/she has no need to memorize or jot down what the speaker says. Simultaneous interpretation is often more suitable for conferences, seminars, and other formal events with a large number of participants and it requires special translation equipment since the interpreter is normally isolated in a booth.

In consecutive translation, the interpreter does not start speaking until the original speaker has stopped. When using consecutive translation, one person speaks at a time. Therefore, the interpreter has time to analyse the message as a whole, which makes it easier for him/her to interpret, translate, and transmit the message in a matter of a few seconds. Consecutive translation is more suitable for smaller meetings and is less confusing for the interpreter and oftentimes results in a more correct oral translation than simultaneous interpretation. Nevertheless, this type of oral translation also has its own challenges, given that it makes translators exposed and visible; requires great fluency, concentration, and self-reliance; and can be very tiring.

Moreover, when it comes to oral interpretation, poor interpretation can even result in the failure of an event. In the worst-case scenario, interlocutors may misunderstand each other, and get an inaccurate intellectual or professional picture due to poor interpretation in Kosovo. Such a situation can arise due to a lack of knowledge or responsibility on the part of the organizer, lack of discipline by participants, poor articulation, and most frequently due to lectures which lack terminology knowledge and accuracy, topic relevance, respect for language styles and underestimate interpreters and interpreting.

To avoid such situations, the speaker should be aware that he/she is speaking through an interpreter, and if the speech is still confusing or lacks order, then the interpreter has no other alternative than to be transmit an unclear message. The speaker should be attentive to the pace of the speech. He/she should address in a normal tone and, as much as possible, follow the interpreter's tempo. Speakers should not talk all at once, as the interpreter cannot translate everything they're saying. Further, they should avoid long and complex sentences or paragraphs and speak in simple, concise sentences. The speaker also should take into account his/her pronunciation and avoid using idioms, jargons, acronyms, and specific humour, so as to avoid other potential sources of misunderstanding.

Facilitation and assistance to interpreters in Kosovo is best provided by the relevant institutions, which employ interpreters, by assisting in the following ways:

1. On-time information concerning the agenda, purpose of the meeting, and context of the speeches;

2. Providing interpreters information about the importance of the meeting and the level of participants;
3. Informing interpreters about the type of interpretation (consecutive or simultaneous);
4. Ensuring a list of specialized terminology and acronyms to be used during the conference;
5. Providing copies of notes or talking points of speeches or presentations;
6. Making the meeting organizer(s) available beforehand to answer possible questions a translator/interpreter might have about the meeting format.

After all, the transparency and success of interpretation depend both on the quality of event preparation and the training, competence, and qualification of the hired interpreters. Important inroads regarding the latter might be made by English departments at universities in Kosovo, which, in cooperation with international organizations, could send interpreters abroad for further language proficiency and specialization in translation.

5. CONCLUSION

In the era when isolationist views are no longer cherished by people in general, in the world of interdependencies and integrations, the need for translation has not only become greater, but it has also gained in importance. Translators/ interpreters act as intermediators in solving various conflicts throughout the world and in exchanging of achievements in civilization, science, technology, art, culture, literature, etc. This comes true especially in Kosovo where translation/interpretation has had a role of great significance throughout the history of Kosovo and the necessity and demand of translation is in constant increase. Therefore, taking into account the challenges faced by translators/interpreters in Kosovo, we sincerely hope that in addition to paying particular attention to ensure proper and professional training for translators/ interpreters in our competent educational institutions, in the not too distant future our institutions and universities in Kosovo, in close cooperation with international organizations, will be able to send translators/ interpreters for language proficiency and specialization in translation/ interpretation abroad. Furthermore, the idea of establishing an Institute for Translation in Kosovo has emerged. This idea, if supported by the international community, would enable the qualification, training, and professional capacity building of interpreters at the international level. Such an idea is very useful, especially now as Kosovo is aiming to further its integration into the Euro-Atlantic social, political, and intellectual community.

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