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LANGUAGE LEARNING, MULTILINGUALISM AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

Nyelvtanulás, többnyelvűség és irodalmi fordítás

Učenje jezika, višejezičnost i književno prevođenje

In the following paper we try to discern the complex translation mechanisms seen in the light of the person performing this delicate operation. The study will focus on investigating and defining the nature, skills, capacities and specific talents that a person able to execute a literary translation has. We will deal with linguistic competences, simultaneous bilingualism and sequential bilingualism, as well as with grammatical versus communicative competences. Along with bilingualism, we will focus also on the topic of multilingualism as a social phenomenon governed by globalization, interculturality and social openness. In this sense, the interest on multilingual individuals, generally referred to as polyglots, could help our approach by providing important information in order to realise a comprehensive analysis of the literary translation process in particular. Operating with terms belonging to the sphere of language use and language learning, the paper aims to explore the topic in an interdisciplinary manner, to create a bridge between the linguistic performance and the translation act itself. At the same time, it outlines how languages, during centuries, with their complex implications for identity, communication, social integration, education and development are of strategic importance for people and the planet.

Keywords: language learning, bilingualism, multilingualism, literary translation

Translation is a curious discipline, existing somewhere between art and science. It is often an act of interpretation, a delicate balancing operation between delivering an accessible version without losing sight of the original product's essence. The translation as a process implicates a dual nature: 1) The

translator needs to detect possible modifications and flaws in the original text and understand the meaning they intend to convey. To do this, the translator often needs to be familiar with the contents of the text in order to clarify the ambiguities s/he has come across. 2) The translator will unwrap the syntactic structure of the original text and then formulate the corresponding message in the target language, thus giving the original text added value in terms of both wording and impact. And here, of course, we can add specific abilities regarding specialized or technical vocabulary characteristic to a specific field of work – as language skills can be useful in many different fields – or, if we speak, for instance, about literary translations, we maintain that the skills of the translator should include a particular talent and sensitivity in text writing, including the fact that he or she could be a writer/poet also performing literary translations.

The role of the language in society represents a crucial issue that concerns our communities especially after the first half of the 20th century, according to the American sociologist, Joyce Hertzler, advocating that more attention should be paid to the interaction and situation (Hertzler 1965). Within this perspective, language is to be understood as a complex phenomenon, both shaping and being shaped by historical, political, social and cultural contexts and therefore with a strong impact on power, discourses and social practices.

Language, language use and language learning and acquisition in society are very important for many reasons. With no language barriers people can understand each other, being able therefore to participate in many societal actions. Obviously here, we speak about the most common role of language: communicating, sharing ideas, information, and specific messages in a way that other people can understand it. Nevertheless, language is more than that. Language can serve to provide a personal identity or it can provide a cultural identity for a community, and for a nation. In that sense, language helps to identify the members of that community or the “outsiders”. In Romania, for example, certain words or accents can reveal that a person is from Bucharest, Iași, Timișoara or Cluj. In a wider sense, those accents can also reveal people who are outside the society as a whole, the way that a Romanian can recognize an Italian or a French accent.

At the same time, language is the main key of inter-cultural dialogue and the expression of a multicultural vision of a society, while the theme of multiculturalism can be viewed from the perspectives of various disciplines: cultural studies, language policies, learning and acquisition, foreign language teaching, linguistics, literature, education science, political sciences or nationalism studies. The present paper intends to deal with multiculturalism starting from a precise topic, i.e. bilingualism and multilingualism, as well as multiple language

acquisition in multilingual contexts. The main goal of this paper is not only to problematize these aspects, but also to insert the mentioned terms in the discussion regarding the profile of the literary translator.

For instance, is the translator conditioned by gender? As argued by Pavlenko, Blackledge, Piller & Teutsch-Dwyer (2001, 1), women are “better at languages”. This represents a realistic assumption corresponding to a very sophisticated field of study – the field of language and gender – that became one of the most dynamic and interdisciplinary areas of linguistic inquiry. The relationship between language and gender emerged as separate topic of analysis in the 1970s, prompted by feminist concerns about the connections between sex, power and language. Over the years, studies claim that women tend to use more standard and/or prestigious linguistic forms and registers, while in the study of multilingualism, this approach strove to explain instances of language shift spearheaded by women as caused by women’s preference for languages that are more prestigious and/or varieties. In the field of Second Language Learning (SLL), it led researchers to posit that female learners generally do better than males (Ellis 1994). Of course, the subject represents even nowadays an important controversy and in the study of bilingualism and SLA the “female superiority” claim finds no support, considering that in some contexts male learners outperform female ones (Polanyi 1995).

In recent years, sociolinguistic and sociocultural perspective have started to gain some currency in the field, but gender continues to be under-theorized and under-researched. The need is to consider it in a more context-sensitive approach, which treats gender as a system of social relations, and discursive practices whose meaning varies across speech communities. Such a context sensitive approach is of crucial importance in explaining the variable outcomes of language use and language learning. As indicated before, the results of findings in research on SLA, bilingualism and gender may appear controversial. Some studies present women as more sensitive to the demands of the linguistic marketplace, and thus as faster L2 learners and users of more prestigious language varieties (e.g. Gal 1978; Nichols 1983). In contrast, other studies depict women as guardians of the home language and culture and as slower L2 learners, for a variety of reasons including restricted access or symbolic resistance to mainstream culture (e.g. Dabène & Moore 1995; Hill 1987).

However, most people are not symmetrically bilingual. Many have learned one language at home from parents, and another later in life, usually at school. Therefore, bilinguals usually have different strengths and weaknesses in their different languages – and they are not always best in their first language. For example, when tested in a foreign language, people are less likely to fall into a

cognitive trap (answering a test question with an obvious-seeming but wrong answer) than when tested in their native language. In part, this is because working in a second language slows down the thinking. No wonder people feel different when speaking them. And no wonder they feel looser, more spontaneous, perhaps more assertive or funnier or blunter in the language they were reared in from childhood. What of bilinguals, raised in two languages? Even they do not usually have perfectly symmetrical competence in their two languages. But even for a speaker whose two languages are very nearly the same in ability, there is another big reason why that person will feel different in the two languages. This is because there is an important distinction between bilingualism and biculturalism. Many bilinguals are not bicultural. However, some are. Moreover, of those bicultural bilinguals, we should be little surprised that they feel different in their two languages. Experiments in psychology have shown the power of “priming” – small-unnoticed factors that can affect behaviour in big ways. Asking people to tell a happy story, for example, will put them in a better mood. The choice between two languages is a huge prime. Speaking Hungarian rather than Romanian, for a bilingual and bicultural Hungarian in Bucharest, might conjure feelings of family and home. Switching to Romanian might prime the same person to think of school and work.

Another important and even more complex aspect for the research is the study of the literary translator in multilingual contexts. The benefits of multilingualism are numerous. For instance, speaking more than one language increases the cognitive abilities of individuals such as problem solving, creativity and memory. Raising a multilingual child is for sure a big challenge and the advantages that multilinguals exhibit over monolinguals are not restricted to linguistic knowledge only, but extend outside the area of language. From this point of view, Transylvania as a historical region has been characterized by multilingualism for centuries (Benő 2015). The substantial long-lived cognitive, social, personal, academic and professional benefits of enrichment bilingual/multilingual contexts have been well documented. Children and older persons learning foreign languages have been demonstrated to have a keener awareness and sharper perception of language. Foreign language learning enhances children’s understanding of how language itself works and their ability to manipulate language in the service of thinking and problem solving (Cummins 1981) and helps them to be more capable of separating meaning from form. They learn more rapidly in their native language (L1), e.g. to read, as well as display improved performance in other basic L1 skills, regardless of race, gender or academic level and are more efficient communicators in L1. Generally, they are consistently more able to deal with distractions, which may help offset age-related declines in mental dexterity.

Multilinguals develop a greater vocabulary size over age, including that in their L1, have a better ear for listening and sharper memories and are better language learners in institutionalized learning contexts because of more developed language-learning capacities owing to the more complex linguistic knowledge and higher language awareness. At the same time, multilingual individuals have increased ability to apply more reading strategies effectively due to their greater experience in language learning and reading in two or more different languages, while “a person who speaks multiple languages has a stereoscopic vision of the world from two or more perspectives, enabling them to be more flexible in their thinking, learn reading more easily. Multilinguals, therefore, are not restricted to a single world-view, but also have a better understanding that other outlooks are possible. Indeed, this has always been seen as one of the main educational advantages of language teaching” (Cook 2001).

Multilinguals can expand their personal horizons and – being simultaneously insiders and outsiders – see their own culture from a new perspective not available to monoglots, enabling the comparison, contrast, critical thinking abilities in understanding cultural concepts. They are able to better understand and appreciate people of other countries, thereby lessening racism, xenophobia and intolerance, as the learning of a new language usually brings with it a revelation of a new culture. Considering also the social and employment advantages, because it offers the person the ability to communicate with people she/he would otherwise not have the chance to interact with, by increasing job opportunities in many careers.

Linguistic diversity in the world today is an issue of growing social importance. Most of the world’s population speaks more than one language, but most of the population in western cultures are monolingual in one of the “big” languages in spite of being exposed to other languages mainly in school context. Therefore, we can say that multilingualism at sociolinguistic level is more spread than multilingualism at individual level, but, even in this case, it is extremely common. The spread of multilingualism justifies its importance in research. In fact, the study of different aspects of the diversity of languages should be one of the main goals of linguistics. Multilingualism can be defined in different ways, but it refers to the ability to use more than two languages. A basic distinction when discussing bilingualism and multilingualism is between the individual and societal level. At individual level, bilingualism and multilingualism refer to the speaker’s competence to use two or more languages. At a societal level, the terms bilingualism and multilingualism refer to the use of two or more languages in a speech community and it does not necessary imply that all the speakers in that community are competent in more than one language.

In most instances, multilingualism arises and is maintained through contact and necessity. Equally, however, multilingualism imposes another necessity, that of crossing barriers. It is obvious therefore that, despite widespread multilingual competence, there arise many occasions when some means of bridging a language gap is required. There are two main methods there: the use of some sort of *lingua franca* or the use of translation.

If we consider *lingua franca*, first we can divide them into three varieties:

1. Existing languages which have achieved some position of power in a region or globally. These varieties have been referred to as languages of wider communication.
2. Restricted or limited forms of existing languages, whose diminished scope is at once easy to master and sufficient for communicative purposes which are, themselves, quite circumscribed.
3. Constructed or artificial languages meant, again, to be easy to learn.

The languages of wider communication represent a special category formed by existing powerful languages, which served as a bridge between national groups and language communities. It is obvious that these varieties achieved widespread power and status because of the heightened fortunes of their users and not because of any intrinsic linguistic qualities of the languages themselves. Greek and Latin, of course, are examples of classical *lingua franca*. After Latin, several other languages have achieved *lingua franca* status. French, for example, was a powerful link language especially in the field of diplomacy from the 17th century until the mid-20th century. Undeniably, Italian, as a component of the original *lingua franca* is clearly important from this point of view, as is Arabic after the Islamic conquests. Today it is no doubt that English is the most important, used global variety, and thus it has the greatest status as a world *lingua franca* (see McCrumm, Cran and MacNeil 1986).

The second major type of *lingua franca* is that of restricted or simplified language mixture. Such term is referred to as a *pidgin*, a mixture of languages, an amalgam, for example, of mainly English words with some Chinese forms, which is no one's maternal variety. However, there are many pidgins in use, most involving a European colonial language.

The third category of *lingua franca* is the artificial or constructed language. The most common example is Esperanto, but the idea of such a linguistic "invention" goes back in the 17th century, when we find that Comenius (1592–1670), Descartes (1596–1650) and Leibnitz (1646–1716) were all interested in a universal auxiliary language that could cross boundaries and since that time there have been hundreds of constructed languages (Edwards 1995).

Another crucial broad approach to bridging languages gaps is that of translation. It is perfectly obvious that using a translator or interpreter has practical benefits. The translator is one whose linguistic competences gives entry to at least two language communities and therefore able to perform comprehension. The Old Italian saying “Traduttore, traditore” suggests that in every act of translation we can find a touch of treason. From a concrete point of view, however, translation, and in particular literary translation – with all its difficulties – is a result of multilingual life and the translator is an agent of multicultural dialogue. Such task is not a simple or technical activity, because, apart from the word-for-word translations, every act of translation involves interpretation and judgment by involving also the linguistic as well as the grammatical and communicative competences of the translator. For these reasons, it has sometimes been supposed that “true” translation is impossible and, consequently, a “perfect” translator represents only an imaginary figure. Translation may be imperfect, but in a multilingual world we need it, we depend on it, because the existence of many languages in the world implies the existence of many cultures.

The translator has the responsibility of conveying the original message into the target language in such way that the reader cannot sense the difference between the original and the translation, but to read it as if it were the original. Considering the example of Hungarian literature, we can imagine an “ideal” translator that is (at least) a bilingual individual living for example in Transylvania, with a Hungarian mother and a Romanian father and possibly a grandmother of German origin. Such a family milieu represents already a great benefit from the point of view of languages acquisition. A child in this situation is exposed to three languages simultaneously from a young age (under 5), and therefore has the possibility to become equally proficient in these languages. This enables the child to increase the understanding of the structure of language and gain a greater awareness of meaning, an increase of metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok & Hakuta 1994). Bialystok argues that metalinguistic awareness also increases bilinguals’ control of linguistic processes, such as having a greater ability to detect grammatical or syntactical errors, and recognize words in continuous speech. Bilinguals have also been found to outperform monolinguals in reading ability (an effect modulated by the relationship of the two languages) and better reading skills in L1 were demonstrated with as little as an hour a week of L2 learning, suggesting that being bilingual is also advantageous in the development of reading as well as spoken language.

In our model, we speak about a particular case of bilingualism/multilingualism, namely simultaneous bilingualism as a form of bilingualism. It takes place when

a child becomes bilingual by learning two languages from birth. In this case, we deal with three languages, e.g. trilingualism: Romanian, Hungarian, and German. According to Annick De Houwer, simultaneous bilingualism takes place in children who are regularly addressed in two spoken languages from before the age of two and who continue to be regularly addressed in those languages up until the final stages of language development. Both languages are acquired as first languages. This is in contrast to sequential bilingualism, in which the second language is learned not as a native language but as a foreign language. Though the simultaneous bilingual child learns two languages at once, this does not mean that he or she speaks them with identical competence. It is common for young simultaneous bilinguals to be more proficient in one language than the other and this is probably related to each child's relative exposure to each language; for example, many bilingual children are more proficient in the mother's than the father's language, arguably because their mothers assume most of the childcare responsibilities and/or simply spend more time with their children. The dominant language is almost always the language spoken by the greatest number of the people the child interacts with (generally the language the child is educated in). The child sees this language as most effective and begins to favour it. In addition, it is possible to show language dominance in one language for one domain and dominance in the other language for another domain. For example, a child may be dominant in his or her L1 at home, but in the school context, his or her L2 becomes the dominant language. Simultaneous trilingualism is also possible. There is significantly less research in this area than in simultaneous bilingualism.

As we can see, the acquisition, production, processing and comprehension of two (and more than two) languages can be interpreted as a possession of an individual, but is strictly dependent on the environment where the individual grows. The family milieu acts as a potentially positive factor in developing multilingualism, but it is not at all sufficient to be born and raised in a multilingual family in order to become a good translator. It is also a question of parental interaction and the way, quantity and quality of the language use they use in teaching it to their own children. Language acquisition is to be seen as a long-term process and not as a momentary phase in a child's evolution. Therefore, the environment a child develops in has influences on language development. The environment provides language input for the child to process. Speech by adults to children help provide the child with correct language usage repetitively. In order to develop linguistic abilities, it is crucial that children socially interact with other people who can vocalize and respond to questions. In order to develop language acquisition successfully, children must be in an environment that allows

them to communicate socially in that language. A multicultural community with co-existing languages represents a good basis for multilingual development and it is obvious that where many language minorities exist, there is often language shift.

However, the development of language in children depends deeply also on (foreign) language instruction, either we speak about native or foreign languages. By the age of six, children have usually mastered most of the basic vocabulary and grammar of their first language. Second language acquisition (also known as second language learning or sequential language acquisition) refers to the process by which a person learns a “foreign” language – that is, a language other than his or her mother tongue. In this context, an important role is played by language didactics in a multilingual environment. Nowadays language and culture mediation skills training is provided through university-based academic education, vocational training and continuing professional development programs across Europe. The research of comparative study on language and culture mediation in the European countries proves that the programs vary in terms of curricula components, graduates’ qualifications, etc. Nevertheless, such programs seem to be similar in respect of a strong focus on the community needs and the common understanding of the need for language and culture mediation skills training in the interdisciplinary context. What is more, in today’s multicultural world, mediation skills seem to be not only an educational field of professionals’ training but an important component on the individual’s generic competences list, as well. As mediation across cultures requires learning of foreign languages, what puts on the agenda the discussion of teaching tools and techniques that can be productive in the foreign language education for mediation purposes to help promote intercultural communication between various ethnic communities. Taking into account everything mentioned above, the foreign language training theoretical and practical framework has to be updated with the view to the language mastery significance for successful mediation goals that are expected to contribute to Europe’s multicultural development.

In the present paper, we consider the concept of mediation from the angle of translation. Nevertheless, taking into account today’s multicultural development at every level (from the family to the entire world), mediation being included into this process, a stronger emphasis is necessary on the mediation skills training through language learning. It is of current importance to analyse what teachers are expected to be competent in taking into account the need for mediation component to be included in the multilingual training due to the mediation dimension of the multilingualism realities. It seems obvious to state that the language teacher needs to be able to raise students’ awareness of the mediation tools and patterns. Today, language teaching methods and approaches focus on

cross-cultural components, and teachers have a wide range of educational aids based on cross-cultural communication practice.

There is another important point concerning the mediation skills training within the language teaching and learning in multilingual environment. Today foreign languages are means of international collaboration in different professional domains. Specialists of different national backgrounds transfer the key patterns of their local specialized corporate cultures into a new multicultural environment. Thus the language mediation phenomenon has to be analysed taking into account different professional and institutional settings. Therefore, the next step that might be on the agenda is to map language and culture mediation skills training within the language for specific purposes training theory and practice. And such a goal requires even a more sophisticated input in didactics in terms of curriculum components, educational aids development, teachers' training as in this case it is necessary to take into account the scope and areas of professional activities which university students are going to perform after graduating from the higher education institutions.

All the above-mentioned factors concur in shaping the profile of the literary translator. Both family and school, separately and together, represent significant influences and potential sources of support for children's learning and development. Parental participation and cooperation in children's educational experiences is positively related to important student outcomes. It is becoming increasingly evident that context is a significant factor in understanding academic achievement, and the setting in which a child, family and school is situated is among the salient contexts influencing performance. It is a premise that regards also the translation field, because choosing to be a translator presupposes a certain love of language and deep knowledge of more than one language. And this is absolutely an essential criterion for the profile of a literary translator. Thanks to a multicultural background, the translator has the ability to understand the source language and the culture of the country where the text originated; at the same time, a solid language education gives him or her the opportunity to know how to use a good library of dictionaries and reference materials, to render that material clearly and accurately into the target language. Nevertheless, it is right to stress that even bilingual individuals can rarely express themselves in a given subject equally well in both languages, and many excellent translators are not fully bilingual to begin with. In other words, while linguistic and cultural skills are still critical, the most important mark of a good translator is the ability to write well in the target language. There is growing awareness that languages play a vital role in development, in ensuring cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, but also in attaining quality education for all and strengthening cooperation,

in building inclusive knowledge societies and preserving cultural heritage and in mobilizing political will for applying the benefits of science and technology to sustainable development. In the current economic climate, language skills can open new doors and make an applicant stand out from hundreds of others. Being multilingual might not be a passport to instant success, but it does present opportunities that otherwise might not exist. This is the reason why in the contemporary society it is vital to take action to encourage broad and international commitment to promoting multilingualism and linguistic diversity, including the safeguarding of endangered languages. As language issues become more and more central to all fields, the official language policies promote an interdisciplinary approach to multilingualism and linguistic diversity involving all programme sectors: education, culture, science, communication and information and social and human sciences. Being a professional and creative translator with a sound knowledge of languages and cultures, capable of participating in internationalization processes corresponds to this intercultural perspective which allow such individuals to act as bridges between civilizations. A translator's action is not a communicative action in a direct sense, but it is a translatorial action. A translator acts in his or her own role as a translator in his or her own situation, producing a text, which is then used by others in a situation of intercultural communication. The translator is usually not immediately present when his or her product is received; this also means that he or she is not in a position to check any feedback. At the same time, there is a general recognition of the complexity of the phenomenon of translation. Furthermore, the 21st century has brought with it a need for intercultural competence and the recognition of the complexity of the phenomenon of translation, which means that it is widely accepted as an efficient tool of intercultural communication.

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NYELVTANULÁS, TÖBBNYELVŰSÉG ÉS IRODALMI FORDÍTÁS

A dolgozat legfőbb törekvése, hogy az összetett műveletet végző személy perspektívájából mutassa be a fordítás bonyolult mechanizmusait. Középpontjában annak vizsgálata és meghatározása áll, hogy az irodalmi fordítást végrehajtani képes személy milyen természetű készségekkel, képességekkel és sajátos adottságokkal rendelkezik. Foglalkozik a nyelvi kompetenciákkal, a szimultán kétnyelvűséggel és a szekvenciális kétnyelvűséggel, valamint a grammatikai kontra kommunikatív kompetenciákkal. A kétnyelvűség mellett a többnyelvűség mint a globalizáció, az interkulturalitás és a társadalmi nyitottság által irányított társadalmi jelenség témáját is érinti. Ebben az értelemben a többnyelvű egyé-

nekkel, azaz a poliglottként emlegetett személyekkel kapcsolatos érdeklődés segíti a kutatást, mivel fontos információkkal szolgálhat, különösen az irodalmi fordítási folyamat átfogó elemzésének megvalósításához.

A nyelvhasználat és a nyelvtanulás szférájába tartozó fogalmakat áttekintve a tanulmány célja, hogy interdiszciplináris módon vizsgálja a témát, hidat képezve a nyelvi teljesítmény és maga a fordítási aktus között. A munka felvázolja, hogy a nyelvek évszázadok során, az identitásra, a kommunikációra, a társadalmi integrációra, az oktatásra és a fejlődésre gyakorolt komplex hatásukkal stratégiai jelentőségűek az emberek és a bolygónk számára.

Kulcsszavak: nyelvtanulás, kétnyelvűség, többnyelvűség, irodalmi fordítás

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UČENJE JEZIKA, VIŠEJEZIČNOST I KNJIŽEVNO PREVOĐENJE

U ovom radu nastojimo da razlučimo složene mehanizme prevođenja sagledane iz perspektive osobe koja vrši ovaj delikatan posao. Studija se fokusira na istraživanje i definisanje prirode veština, kapaciteta i specifičnih talenata koje poseduje osoba koja vrši književni prevod. Rad se bavi lingvističkim kompetencijama, simultanom i sekvencijalnom dvojezičnošću, kao i gramatičkim nasuprot komunikativnim kompetencijama. Uz dvojezičnost, fokusiramo se i na temu višejezičnosti kao društvene pojave, podložne globalizaciji, interkulturalnosti i društvenoj otvorenosti. U tom smislu, interesovanje za višejezične pojedince, odnosno osobe koje nazivamo poliglottima, pomaže istraživanju jer može pružiti važne informacije, naročito za sprovođenje sveobuhvatne analize procesa književnog prevođenja.

Baveći se terminima koji pripadaju sferi upotrebe i učenja jezika, rad ima za cilj da temu istraži na interdisciplinarnan način, obrazujući most između jezičkog dostignuća i samog prevodilačkog čina. Istovremeno, pokazuje kako su jezici tokom vekova, svojim kompleksnim uplivom na identitet, komunikaciju, društvenu integraciju, obrazovanje i razvoj, od strateškog značaja kako za ljude tako i za planetu.

Ključne reči: učenje jezika, dvojezičnost, višejezičnost, književno prevođenje