

SOME ASPECTS OF PRAGMATICS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON TRANSLATION

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Some areas of Pragmatics seem to be valid for all (Indo-European) languages (e.g. Implicature and Presupposition), but others, like Deixis and Speech acts are more language-specific and require changes and adjustment in translation. Some specific issues are considered.

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Levinson (1983) considers Deixis as means of anchoring or fixing a speech event in space (space, or place deixis), time (time deixis) and between participants (person deixis), their roles (speaker, addressee/s, the rest), and the way they communicate (social deixis).

Place (or space) deixis deals with fixing the position of the speaker (writer) at coding time. Thus, ‘here’ denotes a place including the position of the speaker (writer) at coding time. When the writer of (for example) an English article on Dolly the cloned sheep writes that probably humans will be cloned soon, and continues: ‘Not here, for we are one of a handful of countries with thought through legislation that bans human cloning.’, when we translate, we should replace ‘here’ with a more specific item, indicating where that ‘here’ is (Not in the United Kingdom). We should deal similarly with Bulgarian expressions like ‘тук, у нас’ etc.

Another aspect of place deixis involves relative geographical location, which should be modified in accordance with the relative position of the TL country. Thus Middle East is translated in Bulgarian as ‘близкия изток’ (the near east), and vice versa from Bulgarian into English. Deictically, for people living in Britain, Outer Mongolia (a region in the north-east of China) is the remotest location in the north hemisphere, no matter if you go east or west. But it has taken on an idiomatic aspect, meaning something far, far away. So, we should translate ‘Outer Mongolia’ (David Lodge) with its idiomatic meaning as ‘на края на света’ (at the end of the world).

In both English and Bulgarian there are motion deictic verbs, which usually express direction relative to the position of speaker – ‘come’ (towards), and ‘go’ (away from). The corresponding Bulgarian verbs ‘ела’ and ‘иди’ have similar orientation, even when there is a shift of location (projected location) in time. Thus ‘Come to my office tomorrow’ implying ‘I’ll be there’, and ‘Go to my office tomorrow’ implying ‘I won’t be there’ are similarly expressed by the Bulgarian equivalents (Ела в офиса ми утре) and (Иди в офиса ми утре). The English verb ‘fetch’ has the bi-directional meaning of ‘go and bring’. The normal equivalent in Bulgarian would be only ‘донеси’, the idea of where the addressee is at coding time being considered irrelevant to the outcome of the activity, hence the translation ‘иди и донеси’ being too explicit. Differences can also be noted in translating the Bulgarian non-deictic verbs ‘влез’ and ‘излез’, because the English matching expressions are deictic, and depend on the location of the speaker. If both speaker and addressee are outside and speaker says: ‘влез’, the translation would be ‘go in’, if the speaker is in and the addressee out, then ‘come in’. Similarly, for ‘излез’ – ‘come out’ and ‘go out’.

The deictic pronouns and determiners ‘this’ and ‘that’, denoting locations closer to or more distant from the speaker, often have ‘това’ as translation equivalent in Bulgarian, as usage of ‘онова’ is rather restricted, unlike the usage of ‘that’ in English. Another aspect of English is that users often attach emotional values to these words. ‘Oh, this!’ would be an exclamation for something pleasant, emotionally close, whereas ‘Oh, that!’ would be employed for denoting something emotionally distant or unpleasant. That aspect of meaning is unavailable in Bulgarian and should, perhaps, be compensated lexically, if necessary.

Proper names of popular places are frequently used without the identifying common noun, as it is widely known and understood by default by the language users and so become culture-specific. In translation, however, transferring them to another culture medium, such proper names should be accompanied by the corresponding common noun. Examples in both English and Bulgarian include names of rivers – the Thames (река Темза), Марица (the Maritsa river), Искър (the Iskar river) Искърското дефиле (the Iskar river gorge), names of mountains and mountain ranges – Snowdon (планината Сноудън) the Rockies (скалистите планини), Родопите (the Rhodope mountains), Рила (the Rila mountains), Витоша (Vitosha mountain), names of cathedral churches or prominent religious buildings – St Paul’s (катедралата св. Павел), Westminster (Уестминстърското абатство), Александър Невски (Alexander Nevski Cathedral).

Time deixis involves words like ‘now’ - at coding time (or a period of time including coding time), which may differ from reading (decoding) time, or the time of translation. Sometimes this has to be corrected accordingly in translation. Thus, if we translate a text written some time before the translation, the translator should either translate ‘сега’ – ‘now’, accompanying it with a bracketed indication of calendrical time, e.g. now (in 1963), or substitute using the relevant calendrical time.

‘Next’ referring to a time unit denotes the immediately following one, unlike Bulgarian, where ‘следващата (идната) събота’ refers to the unit in the following week. If ‘next Friday’ is mentioned on Tuesday, for example, then it is better to translate as ‘този петък’.

Deictic references to time before or after now may look similar in both languages, but denote different ideas. For example, ‘the other day’ – ‘вдругиден’. In English ‘the other day’ refers to a time before now and had better be translated as ‘оня ден’, whereas ‘вдругиден’'s translation in English should be ‘the day after tomorrow’. ‘now... now’, used non deictically has the Bulgarian equivalent ‘ту... ту’.

Present tense perfect can be considered as time deictic, referring activities and states to a time leading up to and including ‘now’. In other words, states which continue up to the present should not be translated as usual for the perfect, ‘съм + минало причастие’, but rather with the present simple. ‘I *have lived* in London for 20 years’ should be translated as ‘живея в Лондон от 20 години’ and not ‘живял съм в Лондон 20 години’.

Person deixis – there’s no T-V distinction in English pronouns due to the same form. First and second person pronouns cover the same scope in both languages – I – аз sg. (speaker), we – ние pl. (speaker inclusion), you – ти sg. (addressee), you – вие pl. (addressees). The issue of using Вие for a singular addressee is considered below. There are differences in the scopes of gender covered by 3rd person pronouns, but that is outside deixis.

Social deixis refers to how people communicate (basically formally or informally). English speakers also communicate formally or informally. Whereas in Bulgarian formal (socially distant) communication is realised by using the second person plural Вие and the relevant plural verb forms for a singular addressee, in English there’s no T-V distinction in pronouns or verb forms, so English speakers communicate formally by addressing the person by surname, preceded by the title ‘Mr, Mrs, Miss’ or, lately, ‘Ms’ (the latter having no equivalent in Bulgarian), and informally – by first name. Translating an English conversation into Bulgarian, we have to know how the people communicate in order to be able to choose between ‘бихте ли ми подали солта, моля’ (Would you pass me the salt, Ms.

Jones) and ‘би ли ми подал солта’ (Would you pass me the salt, John), for example. Similarly, when translating from Bulgarian into English, we should add title and surname (Mr Soanso) or first name, to indicate the type of social discourse.

This leads to translating speech acts. John Austin (1962) considered a number of cases where by saying something you also do something (christening, wedding, naming of ships, declaring war, betting, etc.) (Levinson 1983). These were later named performatives, when Austin’s idea was extended over all language, i.e. whenever we say something, we also do something (inform, ask, warn, promise, etc.). Austin’s other important contribution is that he subdivided a speech act into 3 – Illocutionary (intended meaning), Locutionary (what is actually said), and Perlocutionary (the effect of what is said on the addressee/ addressees) (Levinson 1983). In translating speech acts, it is sometimes necessary to translate the illocution, rather than the locution, the intention rather than the wording. By saying ‘Call me John’ (for example) the English perform the speech act of invitation to communicate on a friendly, less formal basis, the relevant response either agreeing ‘Mary’, thus completing the change in social discourse, or disagreeing ‘Miss Marple to you’, preserving the formal level. So such phrases should be translated as illocutionary speech acts, rather than literally. ‘Да си говорим на ти, аз съм Джон. Добре, аз съм Мери.’

Every language is a convention between users, which they have accepted and use accordingly. Within any language intended and perceived meaning generally coincide, because both speaker and addressee use the same convention. In each of the considered languages there are numerous idiomatic expressions and set phrases, whose meaning has departed from the meaning of the constituents, but is understood by convention as intended, or illocutionary meaning. But different conventions link different locutions to similar illocutions. In Bulgarian, convention links locutions (utterances) like ‘Ще ти видя сметката!’ (I will see your bill), ‘Ще те очистя!’ (I will clean you up), and ‘Ще ти светя маслото!’ (I’ll sanctify your butter) with the same illocution – a deadly threat. If we translate the locution, an English speaker would not recognise the threat, as English convention links the same illocution to other utterances, e.g. ‘You’re dead’, ‘I’ll kill you’, etc. In all languages certain locutions are linked by convention to certain illocutions or intended meanings, respectively to certain perlocutions (achieving the desired effect). Unfortunately, conventional links are not the same across languages. For example, the popular Bulgarian double-(or triple)-positive negative ‘Да бе, да’ (Yes, yes) or ‘Да да, ще стане’ (yes, yes, it will happen) carry the intended

meaning of ‘most definitely not’, which is more important than the wording. The English ‘Well,’ in the beginning of a sentence is used for gaining time to arrange your thoughts, and corresponds to the Bulgarian ‘амии, а, ъъ’, whereas the triple ‘Well, well, well’ is an exclamation of surprise, similar to the Bulgarian ‘Бре (брех, брей)’. Thus, rather than translating the locution, a translator should choose a suitable substitute in the target language, which carries the same (or similar) illocution and might produce a similar perlocution.

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