



Translation of Vulgarism and Its Implication for Intercultural/Religious Communication

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ABSTRACT

Vulgarities are used by people for a variety of purposes, including as a way of offending or expressing hate speech towards other people, as an intensifier while expressing subjective opinions, for signaling an informal conversation, or as a means for describing vulgar activities. Vulgar language is a term for words, which are referred to as bad words, profanity, curse words, slangs, swear words, blasphemy, dirty words, or taboo generally, denoting a socially offensive language, and their usage are usually considered as inappropriate. Some scholars argue that the only way a translator can translate in an accurate and natural manner, with maximum effectiveness is through learning to translate into the language they make use of habitually. Vulgarisms can often be seen in informal speech and different artistic texts, and the vulgarisms significantly influence the literary prose translation process. Recently, vulgarisms have been observed in greater quantities in mass media; with regard to translating dialogue in television films, a translator can believe it is crucial to make use of the same style as well as the same vulgarisms in a target language. The different strategies translators use in translating vulgarisms are omission/censorship; using vulgarity for vulgarity; substitution; euphemism application, and compensation, and these techniques can have a key impact during intercultural and interreligious communication. Therefore, this study examines translation of vulgarism and its implication for intercultural/religious communication. The research concluded that the translation of vulgarisms has key implications for intercultural/religious communication as regards cultural sensitivity and respect, contextual nuances, and maintenance of ethical integrity. Thus, this study provides various recommendations to ensure translators translate vulgar language in texts appropriately to achieve effective intercultural/religious communication.

Keywords: Translation of Vulgarism; Vulgar Language; Vulgarity; Intercultural/Religious Communication; Culture; Translation Techniques; Cultural Approaches to Translation

Introduction

In language use, vulgarism is common as vulgar words, which are obscene and profane expressions, have an estimated frequency of appearance within the range 0.5%–0.7% in everyday conversational speech (Jay, 2009; Mehl et al., 2007) and 1.15% on the social network Twitter (Wang et al., 2014). Vulgarities are used for various reasons: as a way of offending or expressing hate speech towards other people, as an intensifier while expressing subjective opinions, to signal an informal conversation, or as a means for describing vulgar activities (Cachola et al., 2018). According to Wang (2013), on social media platforms like Twitter, vulgarities are typically used for expressing emotion in language, and people use them to either express negative emotions or sentiment or intensify the sentiment that exists in a tweet.

The primary objective of translation involves reproducing the meaning of the source language and preserving the spirit of the original at the same time. For this reason, all translators must perform several adjustments in order to ensure a healthy balance exists between faithfulness and intelligibility (Krejcarová, 2018). However, Toury (1995, p. 275) argued that "in translation, phenomena pertaining to the make-up of the source text tend to be transferred to the target text". Therefore, this research examines translation of vulgarism and its implication for intercultural/religious communication.

Literature Review

The Concept of Vulgarism

Taboo or vulgarity has a Polynesian origin from the Tongan word "tabu" and it may be due to this origin that vulgarity is often linked to the primitive cultures; however, it is also present well in the contemporary cultures of the Western (Register, 1996; Alavi & Yousef, 2014). Nowadays, vulgarity generally is a term for an activity or a topic, which people prohibit or avoid because of cultural, social, and religious customs (Alavi & Yousef, 2014). Vulgar language includes words that are generally referred to as bad words, profanity, curse words, slangs, swear words, blasphemy, dirty words, or taboo, denoting a socially offensive language, with their usage often seen as inappropriate (Jay, 2000; Moore, 2012).

Translation of Vulgarism and Intercultural/Religious Communication

Newmark (2001) explains that the only way a translator can translate in an accurate and natural manner, with maximum effectiveness is through learning to translate into that language they use habitually. He regards this as the number one criterion. However, Catford (1965, p. 69) believes that “it is generally agreed that meaning is important in translation – particularly in total translation. Indeed, translation has often been defined with reference to meaning; a translation is said to ‘have the same meaning’ as the original”. While Newmark (1998) argues that for any translation, the main aim should be to achieve an equivalent effect for a specific audience, Nida (1964), describes this as “dynamic equivalence”, adding that in her view, equivalent effect can be taken to be the desirable result, instead of the aim or purpose of any translation.

According to Gambier (1994), vulgar words occur in a mild and fewer form in translations compared with the originals, and they produce a stronger effect in written form than in spoken form. Dewaele (2004) shares a similar view and believes that foul language is more offensive in written form than in spoken form, and for this reason, the translators are often required to respect or observe a certain sanctity that is attached to discourse in written form in culture. Even though one of the tasks for the writer could be considered as transgressing certain vulgarity, it is important the translators respect norms of good usage (Alavi & Yousef, 2014). This is especially important in intercultural and religious contexts where nuances as well as subtleties play a key role in communication (Wolf, 2017). Dewaele (2004) maintains that in the quest to ensure the correct translation of vulgarisms, the translator needs to consider the syntactic, pragmatic, and semantic factors in their translation of text into the target language. Harris (2003) stated that various factors affect the choice of translation strategies, including certain contextual factors like stylistic norms, translation commission, policy of the text, the ideology of the translator, and the readership. All these must be taken into account when translating texts with vulgarisms for intercultural and religious communication.

According to Alavi & Yousef (2014), translators seek to convey the message of the vulgarisms using other means rather than those vulgar words themselves. Dewaele (2004) opines that some translators suspect vulgarisms do not often contain the type of meaning, which requires rendering. But Robinson (2006) explains that there are generally four strategies employed in translating vulgarisms. They include substitution; censorship; employing euphemism; and using vulgarity for vulgarity (Robinson, 2006).

Challenges in Translation of Vulgarism

Krejcarová (2018) argues that vulgarisms can typically be found in informal speech and various artistic texts, and these vulgarisms have a significant impact on the literary prose translation process. Meskova (2017) maintains that more vulgarisms have been observed recently in mass media and that when it comes to translating dialogue in television films, a translator can believe it is crucial to make use of the same style as well as the same vulgarisms in a target language. But the author believes this is not a correct strategy because the translator commits errors as they translate vulgarisms present in the text without paying attention to their real meaning in the appropriate context, and this kind of approach shows the translator’s procedure is unprofessional (Meskova, 2017).

When the same vulgarism is used frequently in one film, this creates problems for translators, and this can be observed in both French films and in those films that have English as their source language (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995; Abdelaal & Al Sarhani, 2021). In American films, frequent use of the word “fuck” creates a huge problem for translators (Abdelaal & Al Sarhani, 2021). However, according to Newmark (2001), translation is typically a process protracted and difficult in nature, where a translator encounters a variety of obstacles, with major ones being lexical in nature, not grammatical (that is words, idioms or fixed phrases, and collocations).

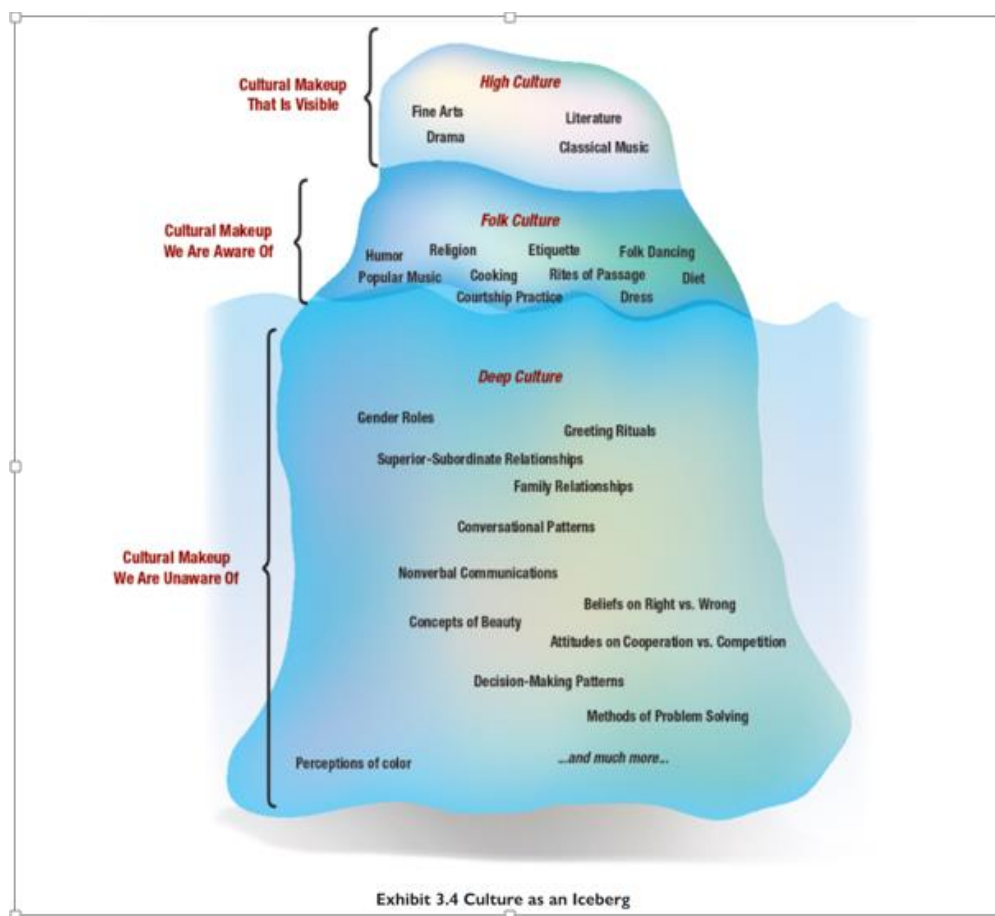
Theoretical frameworks

Owing to the several definitions of “culture” and “translation” by scholars, many cultural approaches to translation exist (Katan, 2012). This study adopts Hofstede’s approach to culture, where culture is defined as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 82; 2001). The paper also regards culture as a people’s total way of life, which puts religion under the bigger umbrella of culture as explained by Cavusgil et al. (2020) in the “culture as an iceberg” model (see Figure 1). As for translation, Catford (1965) approach explained above is adopted, with a translation expected to “have the same meaning as the original”.

However, it could be said culture and translation both revolve around difference because people observe culture as difference, and they require translation in a situation where difference has a significant effect on communication (Katan, 2012). The author divided cultural approaches to translation based on how the difference between self and other needs to be managed when translating text (Katan, 2012). “Translating from cultures” is the first approach, where differences need to be explained; “translating for cultures” is the second one, where either reduction of differences needs to be done (i.e., domestication) or differences highlighted (i.e., foreignization). The third case is “translating between cultures,” which gauges the possible tolerance that exists for difference and strives to reconcile or mediate differences, thereby bringing about an interspace. In the three approaches, texts are regarded as relating to larger frames of interpretation (contexts) and translating texts involves a form of intervention that cannot be merely seen as language transfer.

In Hofstede’s approach to culture, the notion of a “collective programming of the mind” bears a resemblance with the notion of “habitus”, which was developed by Bourdieu (1980), where he explained that a habitus is “a system of permanent and transferable tendencies” produced by some conditions of existence. Habitus can be seen as a collection of durable and ingrained habits, dispositions, and attitudes, which people develop via their social interactions and experiences within a particular sociocultural context (Wacquant, 2005).

Figure 1: Culture as an Iceberg



Source: Cavusgil et al. (2020)

Material and Methods

The methodology adopted for this study is a qualitative approach, which involves the stylistic analysis of translated texts in relevant literature and review of literature on the translation of vulgarisms and intercultural/religious communication.

Results and Discussion

Alavi & Yousef (2014), using the Skopos theory of Vermeer, conducted an analysis of the differences in translation of vulgarities focusing on two types of dramas, stage performance and non-stage performance. ("Skopos" is a Greek word for "purpose" or "aim".) The authors sought to determine whether skopos of translation of these two types of dramas has an effect on the strategies — of omission/censorship; using vulgarity for vulgarity; substitution; euphemism application — that translators use in translating vulgarity expressions or words. They discovered that omission/censorship is the most common strategy, which the translators have employed in translating vulgar expressions and words in the two types of dramas studied, and the authors concluded that no key difference was observed in translation of the two categories of dramas judging from their skopos. Furthermore, in their research, which investigated the strategies used in the translation of taboo expressions and swear words from English language into Arabic language in the movie titled "Training Day", Abdelaal & Al Sarhani (2021) also made similar findings with Alavi & Yousef (2014) and discovered that translators adopted various strategies in the translation of vulgarisms (taboo expressions and swear words). However, unlike Alavi & Yousef (2014) that concluded omission/censorship is the most common strategy, Abdelaal & Al Sarhani (2021) found out that euphemism application and omission are two of the most common strategies used in the translation of vulgarisms.

In addition, Ben-Mebarek (2019) conducted a study that examines rendering of taboo words in the book "The Green Mile" in English (source language/SL) and its translated version in Arabic (target language/TL) without distortion in the meaning of TL's context. The results of the research are in agreement with Alavi & Yousef (2014) and stated that in translating such texts, translators use the techniques of censorship, substitution, euphemism application, and using taboo words for taboo words because it is impossible for them to render the exact meaning of taboo words in the target language.

In translation, the primary objective is the reproduction of the meaning of the source language in a way that ensures the spirit of the original is also preserved. Equivalence is a key technique in this regard. Thus, all translators must make numerous adjustments in a bid to ensure a healthy balance exists between faithfulness and intelligibility. In examining the translation of vulgarism and its implication for intercultural/religious communication, it is essential to look at the translation of blasphemy, which is seen as a kind or a synonym of profanity. According to Jay (2000), the level of seriousness a person shows about blasphemy mainly depends on the way they view God. In the Bible, blasphemy is taken with a high level of seriousness as it is believed that one shall not use the Lord's name for vanities and profanities, and blasphemy is a sin that cannot be pardoned by God (Mills & Roger, 1990).

Krejcarová (2018) did a study on the translation of many chapters from the novel, "A Tiny Bit Marvellous", written by Dawn French. The book has a lot of phrases considered as blasphemy because one of the main characters in the book, Dora, often misuses God's name, for example, in expressions such as "Oh my complete and utter God" and others. In translating such blasphemous expressions, Levý (1998) argues that the translator should consider enriching the text elsewhere for substituting for its impoverishing, in a technique called compensation. Thus, the various strategies translators use in translating vulgarisms include omission/censorship; using vulgarity for vulgarity; substitution; euphemism application, and compensation, and these can have a key impact during intercultural and interreligious communication.

According to Meskova (2017), translators can reduce the level of vulgarisms in texts, and intercultural factors need to be taken into consideration when translating texts. Jay (2000) argues a person's position on religion and blasphemy depends on their psychological development as well as their indoctrination to a religious society. As stated earlier, one of three cases under cultural approaches to translation is "translating from cultures", and here, it is crucial to keep in mind that the context of culture is a big umbrella under which there are many assumptions about appropriate practices, behavior, and values as depicted in language (Katan, 2004). This notion is also explained in Hofstede's approach to culture and the iceberg model that puts religion and many other elements under culture; thus, translators have to pay attention to the culture of the target language in order to achieve effective intercultural/interreligious communication, observe cultural nuances and maintain ethical integrity.

To this end, translators need to consider the second approach, "translating for cultures" when adopting any of the suitable strategies highlighted above for translating vulgarisms, and they should aim to reduce difference through the use of functional (or dynamic) equivalence as much as possible, as explained by Nida (1964). Davoodi (2007) asserts that vulgar expressions and words are cultural and religious issues, and for this reason, it is necessary for the translator to be aware of the culture of the target language so as to translate these vulgarities correctly in a culturally sensitive manner.

The third approach, "translating between cultures", is especially relevant for intercultural/interreligious communication. In this approach, the focus is on the difference that exists between self and other with regard to communicability as well as reader tolerance of cultural distance (Katan, 2012). To adopt this technique, the first step is for the translator to gauge the relative distances (with a focus on factors such as appropriacy, cognitive environment, values, beliefs, and norms) between the source context of culture and the target context of culture. Then, as a privileged reader, the translator negotiates tolerance levels for difference based on the original and new intentions. These steps can be incorporated with any of the translation strategies for vulgarisms outlined earlier to achieve good results in intercultural/interreligious communication.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that the translation of vulgarisms has key implications for intercultural/religious communication with regard to cultural sensitivity and respect, contextual nuances, and maintenance of ethical integrity. Therefore, this study provides the following recommendations:

- In certain cultures, especially the highly conservative ones, the best strategy for translating vulgarisms is censorship, and in this case, the translator should pay attention to the level of profanity or obscenity in sentences censoring them
- Translators should prioritize cultural and religious sensitivity while producing a translation of vulgarisms
- They need to understand the cultural connotations and potential offense that are associated with vulgar language in the source language as well as target languages so they can adopt the most appropriate translation technique(s)
- Translators should avoid using the omission technique as much as possible if vulgar words or expressions are key words/expressions

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