CULTURAL ISSUES IN THE MATRIX OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS

CULTURAL ISSUES IN THE MATRIX OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS

CULTURAL ISSUES IN THE MATRIX OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS

edited by

Hadrian Lankiewicz
Gabriele Blell
Ulrike Altendorf

Contents

Between 22–24 October 2019, a group of students and teachers from the University of Gdańsk's Institute of Applied Linguistics took part in an academic trip to the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin. The whole endeavour was initiated by the Institute of Applied Linguistics and sponsored by the Johann Gottfried Herder Foundation.

Objective: The main aim of the journey was to participate in a seminar entitled "Cultural Issues in the Matrix of Applied Linguistics", held on 23 October 2019 at the JFK Institute with the aim of publishing this monograph, containing co-authored chapters (student-mentor) dedicated to cultural issues (German, Polish, English, and other).

Project partners: Johann Gottfried Herder Foundation, University of Gdańsk, Leibniz Universität Hannover, and Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

The following volume has been peer-consulted and expert-reviewed.
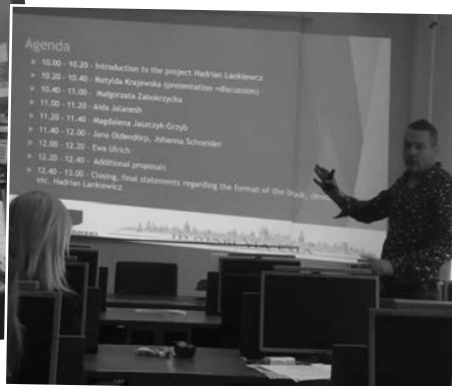
Acknowledgements

Words of acknowledgment also go out to the students who, of their own accord, dedicated their spare time to research in order to heighten their methodological awareness and gain genuine experience in the arduous task of writing an academic paper. Their contributions are certainly not flawless, and may not present state-of-the-art knowledge in their given theme, or may be methodologically questionable, yet they fully conform to academic rigour and hence deserve publication. In this respect, proper words of thanks are due to the mentors who offered their expertise and guidance throughout the whole process of preparing this academic publication.

Introduction

The cultural shift instigated in the humanities in the 1970s accentuated meaning processes as the result of social actions rather than being derived from the structural constitution of the surrounding reality. In doing so, instead of searching for inherent, idealistic meaning, constitutive for people and the world, typical of positivist epistemology and structural linguistics, scholars began to foreground the meaning-making process involving people and about people. Thereby, human cognition came to be perceived as basically endogenous, coming from within, or constituted discursively, hence inherently subjective. In other words, this perspective declares knowing, be it values, lifestyle, beliefs or language use, to be culture-bound. Noesis (understanding or intellect) is the product of the embodied mind. A human being is not a passive receiver of the outside, but generates meaning-making processes and ultimately enacts their world. In this sense, the authors of the notion of enactivism "emphasize the growing conviction that cognition is not the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs" (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1992: 9).

Humans have a powerful tool for enacting the world – language, or more precisely languaging – the ability to operate a general semiotic system rather than a particular language (cf. Lankiewicz and Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, 2014). However, human existence is intricately interwoven with processes of signification in all imaginable fields, hence languaging is inherently related to

culture and thinking. The theory of linguistic relativism, sometimes referred to as Whorfianism, which maintains that people's perceptions are relative to their spoken language, is celebrating a revival at the turn of the twenty-first century and finding new elaboration in contemporary language studies (e.g. Lantolf, 2000). Thereby, convinced of the significance of discursive activities (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002), perceived as the matrix of human endeavours, the editors of the present volume submit a series of chapters pertaining to cultural issues imbedded in language.

The present volume is the result of a seminar (of the same title as this volume), which was held on 23 October 2019 at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin and organised by the Institute of Applied Linguistics at the University of Gdańsk, in cooperation with Leibniz Universität Hannover and Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The primary intention was the preparation and publication of this monograph. The concept is based on the idea of tutoring, close cooperation between experienced mentors and students planning their prospective academic careers. Therefore, the main authors of the chapters are students and their names appear first, but so significant is the support of the mentors on the conceptual research and editorial level that their contribution deserves proper acknowledgement.

Chapter one presents the contribution of Małgorzata Zabokrzycka mentored by Dr Małgorzata Godlewska. Their endeavour pertains to the use of translation strategies in selected sketches by the Monty Python group. The authors try to account for cultural issues in the translation of humour in audio-visual translation from English for two different target audiences, German and Polish. They observe that both renditions violate translation protocols in audio-visual texts in order to domesticate foreign texts and make them more digestible for target audiences. It may be concluded that translation of humour quite often requires the application of idiomatic equivalence and deformation to make texts comprehensible to different cultures. However, the authors observe that the varied application of two

basic translation strategies, foreignisation or domestication, in the Polish and German versions of the original English text also manifest different translation ideologies, which again might be culture-bound. In some respect, the chapter is evocative of the close correspondence between culture, language and human cognition. Perception of humour certainly relies on the correlation of these domains and necessitates the restoration of memory traces to produce a similar comic effect.

In chapter two, the reader will find an analysis of the sociolinguistic context for the literary portrayal of the anti-hero in the fiction of the 1960s. Ewa Ulrich and her mentor Dr Magdalena Grabowska examine three literary pieces from three different cultures, Polish, Swiss and American, which are typical of the period and written in three different languages. The chapter combines literary analysis of the character type with sociolinguistic language codes and the historical and cultural background inscribed in the works. Representing different cultures and using different linguistics means, the anti-heroes conform well to the literary topos of an outsider, contesting designated social roles and the emerging reality of the postmodern. Scepticism, irony and sarcasm help the anti-hero confront the everyday absurdity saturating his existence.

The authors of chapter three (Aida Jalanesh supported academically by Prof. Ulrike Altendorf) offer insights into cross-cultural pragmatics pertaining to realisations of politeness. The authors demonstrate that users of interlanguage, English as a second language in the case of the study, diverge markedly in the sociopragmatic dimension (the aspect of language use relating to the everyday social practices of the target language community) of language competence from native speakers. These users frequently transfer illocutionary acts (realisations of language functions) from their own cultural norms. The ultimate outcome of the research manifests cultural differences in politeness strategies across the spectrum of cultures balanced between individualism and collectivism. Different perceptions of power and different family relations have a drastic effect on the linguistic means of realising

politeness, to take one example. It may be concluded that non-native language users, whose foreign language competence is the result of language acquisition rather than the process of socialisation, will, if uninstructed, be unable to mirror the sociopragmatic competence of natives, and in this respect their language use will be marked by an additional accent, a pragmalinguistic one, which is not to say that they will be communicatively inefficient. This research accentuates the need for a multifaceted approach to any language study in which culture constitutes the foundation of the matrix.

Chapter four by Magdalena Jaszczyk-Grzyb and Prof. Anna Szczepaniak-Kozak probes graphic examples of hate speech. The samples scrutinised, such as graffiti, stickers, a banner and an election leaflet, all motivated by xenophobic prejudice, present instances of hate speech communicated in an implicit and explicit way. The authors base their analysis on the methodology of corpus linguistics and assumptions of critical discourse analysis. Ultimately, they propose to use their examples as a constituent of critical language awareness development during a foreign language class. The theme of raising the critical language awareness of foreign language learners also arises in chapter six.

The chapters which follow take issues pertaining to foreign language learning, yet derive either from cultural transformations (e.g. the new European linguistic reality of multilingualism), new phenomena penetrating the everyday reality of Europeans, such as the surging decentralising tendencies and general distrust towards *the other*, marked by the use of hate speech, or the influence of stereotypical mindsets of language learners on their learning endeavours. Consequently, Jana Oldendörp, supported academically by Prof. Gabriele Blell, proposes the conscious use of decoding strategies (intercomprehension) for comprehension tasks in reading by making use of the multilingual resources of German language learners in the English as a Foreign Language classroom. Student interview data are analysed and discussed, and in their theoretical considerations and research, they draw heavily on the achievements of the concept of multilingual didactics and

learning strategies, in particular the decoding strategy of intercomprehension, which is fundamentally altering traditional approaches to language learning and teaching in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

The closing chapter of the volume by Matylda Krajewska and Prof. Hadrian Lankiewicz considers the effect of language stereotypes on the process of language learning. They present a survey study carried out among learners of English and German and attempt to evaluate how the process of learning these languages at different stages (initiation, motivation to continue and ultimately language use) might have been influenced by perceptions of these languages (language beliefs). The research contains two different groups of respondents (typical foreign language learners and students of Applied Linguistics, who can be defined as plurilinguals) to draw additional conclusions pertaining to the dependence on language beliefs and (critical) language awareness.

All in all, the volume offers a matrix of applied linguistics set in the context of cultural aspects which effectuate language learning and language use. We hope the reader will find the chapters representative, significant and inspiring for further research.

The Editors

References

Jørgensen, M. and Phillips, L. J. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. London: Sage Publications.

Lankiewicz, H. and Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, E. (eds.). (2014). *Languaging experiences: Learning and teaching revisited*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Lantolf, J. P. (ed.). (2000). *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Varela, F. J., Thompson, E. and Rosch, E. (1992). *The embodied mind: Cognitive science and human experience*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press.

Małgorzata Zabokrzycka

gosiazabokrzycka@gmail.com

Małgorzata Godlewska

University of Gdańsk

malgorzata.godlewska@ug.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0002-3425-4899

CHAPTER ONE

A contrastive analysis of Polish and German audio-visual translations of idiomatic phrases in Monty Python sketches

Abstract

The chapter constitutes a contribution to the discussion of translation strategies applied to the rendition of humorous idiomatic phrases in selected sketches by the Monty Python group. The following comparative analysis aims to reveal the differences and similarities in the application of various translation techniques and procedures by two translators representing different target audiences, one Polish and the other German. The theoretical part of this chapter introduces background information about the translation context, the history of the Monty Python group and their key achievements, as well as general features of the British sense of humour. Subsequently, the chapter discusses the characteristics of audio-visual translation and the translation strategies and procedures suggested by Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet (1995) and Michel Ballard (1984). The practical part investigates the global translation strategies of rendering humorous content extracted from the sketches and explores the similarities and differences observed between the German and Polish target texts as well as the deforming tendencies (Berman, 2000) which the translation procedures might entail. The chapter reflects on the translators'

(in)visibility (Venuti, 1995) in the process of subtitle rendition into both languages, as well as on the translators' challenges and their priorities in the translation act.

Keywords: theory of humour, translation strategies, audio-visual translation, translator's invisibility, comparative analysis, subtitles in translation

1. Introduction

Monty Python's Flying Circus might be claimed to epitomise the British sense of humour with its wordplay and puns which rely extensively on motifs of the absurd. What may most encourage an investigation of these hilarious sketches is the fact that they have not ceased to provoke laughter, or at least amusement, despite the passage of time. What is more, the humorous sketches created by the group have been popularised in many other countries in the world, where the 'pythonesque' type of humour is equally appreciated and recognised due to successful translation.

It is our intention to explore some humorous Monty Python sketches and to investigate the translations into Polish and German with a view to discussing the translation strategies and procedures adopted. This analysis compares and contrasts selected translation segments so as to disclose the translators' (in)visibility in the audio-visual rendition of idiomatic phrasemes, as well as to assess the degree of deforming tendencies underlying each of the translators' decisions.

2. Monty Python's group

Monty Python, a British surreal comedy group, established their sketch comedy show *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, which first aired on the BBC in 1969. The group consisted of six comedians Michael Palin, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Graham Chapman, Eric Idle and Terry Jones. At the end

of the 1960s, the five Britons, and one American, changed the principles of television comedy and gained huge popularity. They all, except for Gilliam, came from surprisingly similar backgrounds – middle class, public school, and Oxbridge (television sought new talent from the clubs of Cambridge and Oxford Universities) (Topping, 2007: 4–5).

According to Brian Cogan and Jeff Massey, *The Goon Show* was one of the Pythons' inspirations, as it made them realise that it was possible to create an intelligent and conscious form of comedy (2015: 21). In addition, they created their own, extraordinary style, effectively copied by successive generations of comedians across the world. The absurd humour of *South Park* is one proof of Monty Python's living spirit (Cogan and Massey, 2015: 154). Moreover, famous comedians such as Robin Williams, Steve Martin, or Jim Carrey have often spoken about the Pythons as their touchstones (Cogan and Massey, 2015: 29), and even the writer Douglas Adams is known for his connection to the group. After having written and performed forty-five episodes of sketch shows for BBC Television, the Python group released several feature films, further television series, touring stage shows and numerous albums and books. Irony and the absurd are the main features in their humour, and elements of both can be found nearly in every episode of their famous series (Landy, 2010: 171) and definitely in each of their films. Their whole production abounds in nonsensical sketches with silly dialogues and impossible behaviour. Their most remarkable feature films include *And Now for Something Completely Different* (1971), *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), *Monty Python Live at the Hollywood Bowl* (1982) or *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* (1983) (Morgan, 2005).

Not only did they have a profound impact on British comedy, but they also found popularity in the United States in the 1970s, and shortly thereafter became famous all over the world. The group enjoyed entertaining audiences by using boldly absurd connotations. They practised the British tradition of cross-dressing comedy by donning frocks and make-up and

playing female roles themselves while speaking in falsetto. In addition, at the end of their sketches no one really knew if they had finished or not because chronology was very often disordered. Animated inserts were used, usually created by collage technique from old photos (Cogan and Massey, 2015: 107), and sketches were combined with unexpected, nonsensical scenes: "To paraphrase an ancient joke: 'How many times do people laugh at a Monty Python sketch? Three times: once when they see it, a second time when a friend explains it to them, and a third time when they finally get it'" (Cogan and Massey, 2015: 17).

This absurd type of humour might be hard to understand, especially for foreign viewers, because of the cultural or religious inequalities and because of varying socially accepted norms of behaviour, ethics and sensitivity. Thus, the Pythons were notorious for breaking rules of social behaviour and for challenging stereotypes. Although many of their productions may be perceived as pure tomfoolery, a large percentage of their sketches is also mockery of British society (e.g. individual social strata) and institutions (in particular from local public television) (Cogan and Massey, 2015: 30–34). The "Spanish Inquisition" sketch combines historical themes of the British class system and a passion for playing with words. Issues related to sex, politics, historical events or power proliferated in their dialogues, in this way questioning any conception of the phenomenon of taboo. The Pythons did not accept any limitations in their artistic expression and extended the boundaries of the comedy genre, which underlies their subsequent universal success. They have become true icons of the genre of surrealistic comedy which has no parallel form of expression, just as they have no direct descendants (Cogan and Massey, 2015: 16–17). As a matter of fact, the influence of the group has been so significant that a word describing their style of humour has made it into the *Oxford English Dictionary* – the neologism 'pythonesque' is an adjective "denoting or resembling the absurdist or surrealist humour or style of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*".

Gdańsk University Press