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The role of emotions in establishing meaning: implications for interpreting

Olgierda Furmanek
Wake Forest University

ABSTRACT

Following Cronin's (2002: 388) statement that "if we do not recognize the specific psychodynamics of orality, then our analyses of interpreting encounters will repeat assumptions that underlie depictions of unsophisticated and dissembling native", this work intends to underline the importance of the external and internal psychological factors that influence the functioning of the interpreter, focusing on emotions and meaning. In what follows, I discuss connections between linguistic performance and emotions and present a hypothesis of its possible implications for the interpreting activity.

KEYWORDS

interpreting, meaning, extra-linguistic, emotions, multilingualism.

1. Introduction

A 'turn' in interpreting research is still much needed, and as claimed by some interpreting scholars (Cronin, 2002), this may be a cultural turn similar to what happened in Translation Studies. Interpreting inquiry has concerned itself mostly with discourse and its functioning. According to Cronin (2002: 1-2), discourse understood in a broad sense is "everything beyond the sentence, i.e. social practice that includes extra-linguistic and non-specific aspects of language." A turn, be it cultural, psychological, or sociological, needs to take into consideration the extra-linguistic aspects of the interpreting process.

The extra-linguistic dimension of the interpreting encounter includes physical, psychological, and moral elements. Cronin (2001: 389), outlining a possible future for Interpreting Studies, points out that "a chief question is how to properly understand illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in interlingual exchanges" and underlines the necessity to increase the role of anthropology and ethnography in interpreting research. It appears that the sociological component of the shift suggested by Cronin will be closely related to one of the most critical issues in interpreting: the question of power. Anderson (1976: 214), discussing the notion of power in his seminal essay on the role of the interpreter, states that the interpreter is "the power figure, exercising power as a result of monopolisation of the means of communication." It has been noted by such researchers as Jørgensen, Myers-Scotton, Sachdev, Richard that power conflicts in communication are associated with gender, class, nationality, or

identity, but as I present it in this essay, the problem of control also lies deeply within each individual's psychological structure, which determines the interpreter's behavior and choices during the interpreting performance, often made in a semi- or fully subconscious way.

Following Cronin's (2002: 388) statement that "if we do not recognize the specific psychodynamics of orality, then our analyses of interpreting encounters will repeat assumptions that underlie depictions of unsophisticated and dissembling native," this work intends to underline the importance of the external and internal psychological factors that influence the functioning of the interpreter, focusing on emotions and meaning. Thinking is dialogue with oneself and reading is dialogue with the text. Translation involves both forms of dialogue. Translators constantly enter into dialogue with the others, with the written, and with oral discourse but also with themselves. The act of translation, written or oral, is dialogical *per se*, as demonstrated by Robinson (1991), or quadrillogical, according to Rosenstock-Huussy (1988b), or perhaps even polylogical.

The interpreter's situation is one of dialogue; nevertheless, it is not only dialogue that negotiates external realities as multisubjective, power-laden, and incongruent (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 15) but also an internal dialogue with his own inner self about the interpreted event that can lead to feelings of suppression, excitement, guilt, trauma, or which in turn can result in manipulation. Such a dialogical principle is the foundation of my analysis of the interpreter's vulnerability to emotions during his/her meaning construction, as compared to the meaning construction during the act of reading for translation purposes.

2. Language and emotions

Classification systems such as Jakobson's (1990: 69-79) that divide the role of language into particular functions—conative, referential, phatic, metalinguistic, poetic, and emotive—follow in the direction of Austin's point who was already critical of the classical self-expression approach to the language roles (1962: 94-107). Austin demonstrated the difficulty of classifying different lexical areas such as greetings, insults, and promises. Caron (1989: 55) suggests that the theoretical framework within which Jakobson's analysis is situated is still inadequate for describing the functions of language: "By reducing speech to the circulation of information, it [theoretical framework] does not reach one of its fundamental aspects, that is, the communication as action and as interaction." In other words,

the speech act is carried out in a context that exposes us to a change. Mutual comprehension is compromise. Every encounter dis-integrates and re-integrates us, carrying us to new dimensions of consciousness. We reorganise our lives as a result of our encounters with others, and words find their *raison d'être* in the process. By engaging in expression and communication, we realise human potential.

Gusdorf (1965: 39) cites Henri Delacroix's provocative comment that "The word is created each time it is uttered," which suggests that the word does not exist outside of the present, outside of its current meaning. Discourse is created at the same time that one's life experience is being created. Gusdorf (1965: 39) concurs that communication revolves not around speech but the speaker, and he speaks of a continuous reconstruction (*réfection permanente*): "Even the most apparently insignificant expression contributes to this work of continuous reconstruction." Gusdorf (1965: 42) believes that communicative acts constitute the core of one's existence, since for him "it is through speaking that man comes into the world and the world comes into thought."

Gusdorf also speaks of speech mechanisms as *centripetal* (expressive) and *centrifugal* (communicative). In reality, individuals speak in order to define themselves. We do not speak in isolation from others, although many times—as I will demonstrate in the following pages—we use speech to distance ourselves. First, however, we need to be with others and interact in order, subsequently, to be able to have a person or people from whom to create this distance. In this way, human identity is created through counter-action, co-existence, and communication.

In this work, I refer to the communicative act as a multiple act with several components, as proposed by Austin (1962: 98-100). First is the

locutionary component or act of utterance corresponding to the utterance itself, its grammatical structure and basic meaning. Second, there is the *illocutionary* component or act corresponding to intention produced by the act of utterance where the context matters seriously. Finally, the *perlocutionary* act or perlocution is the consequential effect deriving from performance of the locutionary act or perlocutionary act.

In her analysis of Austin's speech act, Silva-Corvalán (2001: 195-196) observes, in reference to discourse analysis, that:

Linguistic communication is not carried out only with the proposition of informing on something, but rather very frequently with the proposition of managing to get someone to do something, to react somehow to the utterance of the speaker. That is to say, language is useful to us for getting things done: asking questions, greeting, asking for pardon, offering condolences, asking for a favor, giving directions, insulting, inviting, promising, threatening, etc.

The two basic components for my research are the *illocutionary* component or act of utterance (although at times the speaker is not cognizant of his or her own intentions) and the *perlocutionary* component or act of utterance, which refer to the new quality being created due to the speech act and to the pragmatic consequences of the act. Caron (1989) underscores the presence of extralinguistic laws that determine perlocutionary acts, which confirms the hypothesis that emotions are one of the factors used to select linguistic parameters, not only in monolingual production but also in code-switching and foreign language terminology building. Caron (1989: 77) writes:

Illocutionary and perlocutionary acts each have as their objective to transform a situation; however, while the first employ specific rules of discourse to this end, the second use intervention of laws (psychological for example) whose origin and scope are external to the discourse.

Recent sociological inquiries reverse the trend of downplaying the role of emotions in social interaction. In his introduction to *Emotions and Sociology*, Barbalet (2002: 2) affirms that

A well-developed appreciation [of the importance of emotions] is absolutely essential for sociology because no action can occur in a society without emotional involvement. By society I mean an interactive system. The smallest society in this sense, is a single human person choosing between alternatives, for such a choice requires an internal dialogue.

The interpreted encounter overflows with emotions, both at the level of the parties' interest and the feelings rising in the interpreter who strives to reconcile and select the meaning to be conveyed. I intend to demonstrate that without the emotions category, the conceptualisation of the interpreting process would be fragmentary and incomplete. In what follows, I discuss connections between linguistic performance and emotions and present a hypothesis of its possible implications for the interpreting activity.

3. Multilingualism and emotions

Wierzbicka (1991; 1999a; 1999b) has demonstrated that bilingual/multilingual individuals conceptualise their emotions differently in each of their languages and that they might or not find direct equivalencies for those concepts in different languages. Recently, Pavlenko (2002) has turned her attention to the interdependence between emotions and bilingualism, investigating discursive constructions of emotions in Russian-English bilingual adults. The emotionalists speak of emotive discourse and of discourse on emotions. Emotional reactions are generally manifest in intended and intellectual communicative strategies. However,

obvious evidence exists regarding subconscious emotional reactions that are of greater importance for the dynamics of dialogue. I cite here an extensive quotation from Foppa (1990: 197) because it sets the stage for the discussion of my hypothesis:

While the interlocutors are, at least to a certain degree, aware of their emotional states, even if they do not want to reports on them, there are other examples of deviations from neutral coherence that are neither the result of strategic intentions nor the expression of a specific emotional state. [...] Interlocutors may communicate with each other in a non-co-operative way, using very subtle means to hinder their partner(s) from participating in the conversation in an adequate way. [...] It may therefore be appropriate to speak of the functional effectiveness of these (unintentional) communicative strategies.

Bilingualism adds new dimensions to the emotive aspect already found in discourse in a single language, especially when we consider the causes for preferring to use different languages in different contexts. The core of the following discussion in this work deals with emotions and their role in selecting one language over another or in selecting terms in a given language that had been acquired in a context strongly marked by emotion.

Up to now, little attention has been devoted to this psycho-sociological dimension of multilingual production, since the prevailing focus has been on the cognitive processes or conscious communicative needs. Some researchers have suggested possibilities for these socio-linguistic processes. Saville-Troike (1982: 190) says that Giles et al. (1973) attribute linguistic convergence, or the modification of language toward the variety used by other speakers in an encounter, to a desire for listeners' social approval. According to Giles, on the other hand, linguistic divergence—what interests us in this study—occurs when a speaker wishes to dissociate himself from listeners. Saville-Troike (1982: 190) states that this may be an unconscious emotional response but can also be a "deliberate tactic of ethnic dissociation and psychological distinctiveness" as observed by Bourhis et al. (1979). Saville-Troike (1982: 191) concludes that "the relationship between language and identity along this dimension is thus bi-directional: feelings of closeness or distance may trigger similarity or dissimilarity in language patterns; conversely, the feeling of being on the same linguistic 'wave length' is likely to promote solidarity." In the chapter on "Bilinguality and Multilinguality" in the *Handbook of Language and Social Psychology* (Giles & Robinson, 1990), Sachdev and Bourhis provide different reasons for code-switching: normative, motivational, and socio-structural. Above all, they focus on the position of the individual in society and on the construction

of his or her identity. Researchers such as Jørgensen, Myers-Scotton, Sachdev, Richard have explored the role that a particular language register or terminology usage plays in the power stratification in various societies.

Gonzalez (2001), for her part, associates code-switching with the social environment, demonstrating that in bilingual families of Arizona, Spanish is used in the home (meals, house, family), while English is used in contexts outside of the home (work, school). Thus, Gonzalez (2001: 66) suggests:

It [code-switching] becomes, in Bakhtin's terminology, a type of living heteroglossia: two languages with highly differentiated levels. Spanish is associated with music, with affect, with the diacritic construction of self. English, as evidenced in the sound tapes of family interactions, is the medium of informational exchange and of functional subsistence within the community.

However, Gonzalez (2001: 71) finds that this linguistic organisation is interconnected with emotions. Gonzalez concludes her observations by saying, "For children, social experiences are 'in process'; that is, the forms of these experiences are not fully in place. It is precisely in childhood that feelings or emotion connects with the ideological dimensions of the social worlds. The interweaving of language ideologies and emotions for children cannot be overemphasized."

4. Emotions and meaning

Apart from the influence of emotions on the language preference in multilingual individuals, emotions imprint themselves in the development of terminology in the foreign language at any level of proficiency acquisition. The meaning is established in the learner's dialogue with his own previous cognitive baggage under specific spatio-temporal and psychological circumstances.

While the concept of connotation has been gradually replaced in Translation Studies with the concepts of designation (reference to the extralinguistic reality) and meaning (conceptual content that depends on the general knowledge and includes remissions to other meanings), such meaning construction can also be compared to an encounter with a text, since a reader recreates the text for her- or himself. Every reading, even a monolingual reading, is an inter-relation. The reader re-creates the text at the same time that the text re-creates the reader. It seems as though this influence is multiplied or at least duplicates in relation to a text in translation. The text cannot exist outside the reader and the reader brings it into existence every time she or he reads it.

According to Paz (1973: 168),

The poem is a verbal mechanism producing meanings only and thanks to the reader or listener who sets it into motion. The meaning of the poem is not in what the poet meant but rather in what the reader says through the poem.

The reader-response theory was particularly applied to the reading of the literary works; for example, by examining the reactions to the same poem read by the same person, but in different places and different moments, with each reading being a new creation. This is true not only for the reading of a poem, a novel, or a play but also for any text whatsoever. This may be more evident in the case of translation, because in order to even initiate the process, the translator reads the text many times over, and then continues to do so in different languages—the text in SL and the text that is being created out of the SL text in TL. The intensity of creation is higher in translation, because translator's mind is forced to function in a more intense way. The interpreting act involves constant meaning recreation in an even more intense setting. Meaning construction during interpreting can be compared to the one in a simple reading activity, or in a reading for translation, but the reaction to the conceptual content of an utterance and its extralinguistic remissions needs to happen much faster.

Barthes (1974: 10-11) asks if it is the reader who creates the meaning of each word, each sentence, or if it is the text which evokes meanings in the reader when he writes:

Yet reading is not a parasitical act, the reactive complement of a writing which we endow with all the glamour of creation and anteriority. It is a form of work (which is why it would be better to speak about the lexeological act—even a lexeographical act, since I write my reading) and the method of this work is topological: I am not hidden within the text, I am simply irrecoverable from it: my task is to move, to shift systems whose perspective ends neither at the text nor at the "I": in operational terms, the meanings I find are established not by "me" or by others, but by their systematic mark. [...] To read, in fact, is a labor of a language. To read is to find meanings, and to find meanings is to name them; but these named meanings are swept toward other names; names call to each other, reassemble, and their grouping calls for further naming: I name, I unname, I rename; so the text passes: it is a nomination in the course of becoming, a tireless approximation, a metonymic labor.

Although the idea that meaning is established by its systematic markings is difficult to accept from the linguistic point of view, the description of calling a text into existence and naming it seems appropriate. Borrowing from Barthes, and further drawing upon the reader-response theory, interpreting can be viewed as re-formulating, not only the pure information in the other language but also re-enacting that information. In Goffman's (1981) words, this occurs as an animating or rather re-animating the previously

produced utterance, as elaborated by Kozin (2003). A certain degree of appropriation must also inevitably occur in this re-animation process. Reading is the act of work, it is re-writing; similarly, listening is already re-saying. The text is exposed to a multiplicity of meanings that take the reader along; likewise, the reader lets the text work in his/her cognitive baggage. This is more so the case for translation, which is, in the words of Barthes, a strictly lexicographical activity. More than the monolingual reader, the translator constantly reads and writes, and then reads and writes again; similarly, so does the interpreter, dealing in a *va-et-vient* mode with the conversational moves.

Striking similarities between the work of a reader, especially the one who reads not for himself but with the purpose of re-telling (agendas, news, stories etc.), are summarized by Paz (1967: 168) when he refers to the work of the poet: "The poet is a creation of the poem, just as the poem is of him." This locates the issue at the heart of reader-response theory. The idea of reading as an inter-relation between both parties is reflected in the criticism of Rosenblatt (1968), Fish (1980), and Bleich (1994). Fish (1980: 332) explains further what Paz expressed in his brief and proverbial way:

Thus while it is true to say that we create poetry (and assignments and lists), we create it through interpretive strategies that are finally not our own but have their source in a publicly available system of intelligibility. Insofar as the system (in this case a literary system) constrains us, it also fashions us, furnishing us with categories of understanding, with which we in turn fashion the entities to which we can point.

In his analysis of Rosenblatt, Bleich approximates Barthes. The reader defines this experience, Rosenblatt (1968: 27) suggests, by bringing

to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text.

Bleich (1994: 144), by saying that "each reading of a text, according to these considerations, is actually a different poem, a term which should designate an involvement of both reader and text," continues the same idea of cooperation that was presented by Barthes. The participation of the reader, the creation of his meanings, is effected both in the text always created anew and at the intellectual and emotional level of the reader. As mentioned earlier the intensity of creation is higher in translation, because translator's mind is forced to function in a more intense way. In

those moments, his vision of the world is further developed, meanings are interspersed, and his mode of perception is reorganised. Schopenhauer (1992: 34-35) gives an excellent description of this process when describing how one learns foreign languages:

From all this it becomes clear that new concepts are created during the process of learning a foreign language to give meaning to new signs. [...] Therefore, an infinite number of nuances, similarities, differences, and relationships among objects rise to the level of consciousness as a result of learning the new language, and thus one perceives multiple perspectives of all phenomena. This confirms that one thinks differently in every language, that our thinking is modified and newly tinged through the learning of each foreign language, and that polyglotism is, apart from its many immediate advantages, a direct means of educating the mind by correcting and perfecting our perceptions through the immersing diversity and refinement of concepts. At the same time, polyglotism increases the flexibility of thinking since, through the learning of many languages, the concept increasingly separates itself from the word. [...] This difference does not leave room for a word-for-word rendering but requires that we melt down our thoughts entirely and recast them into a different form.

The interpreter (and the translator) is the one who continues to learn the foreign language with every project s/he undertakes, and this is exactly what occurs constantly as one translates. The interpreter must melt his or her concepts to the primary matter so as to reformulate them in another language. When this melting occurs, interpreters (translators) are confronted with their origins and are forced to ask if the meanings discovered are in reality what they expected to find in their cognitive networks.

There are various conceptions of establishing meaning dependent on the received emotional stimuli, from philosophical notions to those found in the field of Translation Studies. Johansen (1993) presents an interesting "essay on signs and meaning" in the tradition of dialogical semiotics as viewed mainly from a Peircean perspective. A great compendium of international views on meaning is found in the *festschrift* of the great Polish semiotician Jerzy Pelc, compiled by Jadecki and Strawinski (1998). Many linguists accept the definition of meaning as the definition of the thing or idea realised in context. For example, meaning, according to Silva-Corvalán (2001: 197), has certain variables: referential or basic, contextual or discursive, and prototypical discursive. A slightly more psycholinguistic definition of Altmann (1997: 122) suggests that "the concept associated with something is the accumulated experience of that something, whether it is an object, an event (e.g. running, flying), a property (e.g. yellow, fast, high), or whatever; and in each case, the meaning of the word is simply a pattern of neural activity that reflects that accumulated experience," which

adds another layer to our analysis of the extra-linguistical factors in the interpreter's performance.

Furthermore, meanings are re-created as we live and do not only emerge already prepared from our conscious or subconscious. They are created at the exact moment of the reading, listening, and observing in the here and now. There is a difference between daily conversation and poetic "conversation." In the discourse of daily life, we do not stop to evaluate the meaning of the word; in poetry, on the other hand, we immediately wonder what kind of connotation enters our minds upon reading the word. For example, the word "class" in the context of an utterance like "What time is your class today?" asked by a colleague is limited to an informational level and evokes nothing more in the interlocutor's mind. If one reads the same utterance in a poem "What time is your class today?", his thoughts may carry him back to memories of grade school, to developments in his life, to existence, or to the challenges of living, etc. From this point of view, the oral translation of any text, be it technical or legal, requires a poetic attitude, one that we could call the supreme conscience of meaning.

In daily life, meaning is enriched and expanded every time one lives a new experience in the reality associated with a given concept. A girl born in Slovakia associates the word 'mountains' with the Tatras. While a university student, she takes trips through Switzerland, France, and Spain, after which she will reformulate her concept of mountains by adding the Alps and Pyrenees to the Tatras. If she moves to Colorado in the United States, the Rocky Mountains will influence her concept of the mountain. The image of Tatras dominates over her associations when she hears the word 'mountains,' and is not due to the order of her experiences but rather because her ideo-linguistic experiences of childhood have a higher emotional charge (Gonzalez, 2001). This hypothesis requires more research, and would include exploring such questions: What does the intensity of the most current meaning depend on? Which of the past experiences is predominant? Or is the most current meaning actually the vector of all previous experiences?

Is it possible that if the Slovakian girl falls in love next year with a Peruvian during an excursion in the Andes that her concept of the Andes (due to its intense emotional charge) will predominate in her association with the word "mountains" from now on? Cognitive linguists offer us a wider range of research in terms of the production of meaning, functioning of the brain, and the relationship between thought, emotions, and discourse.

Meanings depend on the experience of the person in a particular language. They are not only the linguistic denotation of a dictionary put into practice, realised in intra-linguistic (utterance) and extra-

linguistic (conditions of utterance—time, space, feelings, etc.) contexts. The creation of meaning upon reading/hearing a new word in a non-native language can be divided into two components: assimilation and creation *per se*, the formulation of new connotations. *Assimilation* occurs in most of the cases. One either recognises the images linked to the word, or interprets them by situating them in known areas of one's cognitive network of the native language as equivalences. Therefore, mountains = *hory* (in Slovak): the connotation of the Tatras is equivalent to the word 'mountains' in English for a Slovakian who has learned English in Slovakia. One must refer the new linguistic form to a known concept. According to Burnshaw (1970: 108), "for the human nature, when confronted with anything strange instantly, almost by a reflex of the organism, begins to assimilate it to the known, to his world of the familiar; to make ordinary meanings from the message. Humankind, unable to bear much uncertainty, must relate them to what it knows."

Creation of new concepts means introducing denotation along with the connotation of new words into the vocabulary of the person by means of dictionaries or other sources of information on the foreign language. In this case *stołówka* (in Polish) = the place where students in Poland eat; and *cafeteria* (the word is a loan word in English, although that does not matter here) = the place where students in the U.S. eat. For a Polish person learning English or this new word in the U.S., the two are not equivalent because both eating places, although each serving food for college students, are entirely different in each case and no equivalency can be established. In the case of the "mountains" where assimilation took place, there are so many characteristics in common between the concepts of mountains in the mind of the Slovakian who has never seen other mountains than the Tatras that the words "mountains" and *hory* can be equivalent.

In the case of the interpreted event, where the conscience of the meaning construction, due to its immediacy factor, is significantly lower than during the translating activity, the construction remains even more dependent on current and/or previous emotional experience of the interpreter.

5. Conclusion

I would underscore that linguistic effects caused by emotions undoubtedly influence various dimensions of interpreting activities. The emotional charge of the interpreter's connotations determines his or her terminological options and creates a particular

background and mood for his or her work. The resistance of interpreters to use terminology in certain fields, the types of their most common errors, and their preference for some expressions not entirely appropriate for the register required by the situation, depend not only on the level of their linguistic competence and professional experience but also on their linguistic-emotional baggage. More acute awareness of this phenomenon would improve the quality of interpreting activity where immediacy of the situation usually does not allow for low emotional impact that would be decreased with time. What remains is to examine closely and describe the correlations between emotions and interpreting and, once understood, to find the methods that would allow this phenomenon to yield more effective translation instead of blocking it.

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Olgierda Furmanek received her Ph.D. in Translation Studies from the University of Nebraska, USA. She is currently an assistant professor of Spanish and the founding director of the Certificate Program in Translation/Localization and Interpreting at Wake Forest University, North Carolina. Her research interests include psychology of interpreting, interpreters training, and the ethics of interpreting and translation. For years, she worked as a translator, interpreter, terminologist, language consultant and localisation specialist in Polish, English, Spanish and French. She can be reached at furmano@wfu.edu