AL-FARABI KAZAKH NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Department of International Relations

Chair of Diplomatic Translation

**Translation business in the field of international and legal relations**

**“Linguistic and cultural aspects of translation”**

2024-2025 academic year, fall semester

Lecture 10

Module 2 Contemporary issues of translation studies

Lecture 9 Cultural dimension of communication

When we talk of cultural translation, we often refer to phenomena which go beyond language.

To understand cultural translation we must think of what we mean by culture. Below you will find some key definitions and a discussion of what they mean for the practice of translation.

In a way, we could say that all translation is ‘cultural translation’, since language is a cultural practice: one of the key ways in which cultures are created, expressed, and understood (or misunderstood).

In the 1990s, translation scholars proposed what is now known as ‘the cultural turn’ in translation studies, insisting that to understand how translation works we need to think of it as a cultural operation, a tool that allows us to move not just between languages but also between cultures. Besides the Source text and the Target Text, the Source Language and the Target Language, we also need to think of the Source Culture and the Target Culture (S. Bassnett, Translation Studies, 1980).

Culture is a complex term, however. It might be interpreted as ‘high culture’, or ‘Culture with a capital C’, that is the kind of knowledge that is acquired through formal education. When it is used in connection with translation, however, ‘culture’ is usually understood in a different sense, developed mostly in social sciences such as ethnography and anthropology. The definitions below provide a good picture of what ‘culture’ means in this sense:

The ways of people. – Robert Lado

Integrated system of learned behaviour patterns which are characteristic of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance. – E. Adamson Hoebel

The ideas and the standards we have in common. – Ruth Benedict

The whole complex of traditional behaviour which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation. – Margaret Mead

The shared patterns of behaviors and interaction, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. – University of Minnesota Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition

(Source: M.A. Bancroft, S. García Beyaert, K. Allen, G. Carriero-Contreras, D. Socarrás-Estrada, The Community Interpreter: An International Textbook, p. 246)

If we think of culture in this way, it is very much part of our everyday lives. And translation is a key process for all kinds of cultural communication: both within one language (intralingual translation) and across different ones (interlingual translation).

Culture, understood in this way, can also be a set of behaviours, including specific language conventions and habits, associated with a particular activity or profession, from sport to law or medicine.

Tip: for a humorous example of how translation can work between registers of the same language and be linked to a specific context or profession, try watching [this video of Barack Obama](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkAK9QRe4ds) and his ‘anger translator’.

When we consider the cultural dimension of communication, we can also see that translation is a layered, complex activity: often, for instance, interlingual translation between languages can be combined with specialist translation, for instance when translating a legal text into the language of a country whose legal system differs substantially from that of the Source Text.

In the next step we will look at localisation as a form of cultural translation.

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