The Politics of Translation and Interpretation in International Communication 🔓

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Summary

Traditionally, translators and interpreters are viewed as neutral intermediaries who facilitate communication between people who do not share the same language. However, because cultural consciousness is embedded in language, translation and interpretation do not simply transfer information from one language to another but are political acts that can define, shape, and resist norms and values of both the source and target cultures. The production of translation and interpretation cannot be separated from the analysis of knowledge, reasoning, and cultural consciousness—along with the tensions inherent in the (re)production of power and cultural hierarchies.

There are four themes when exploring the politics and political nature of translation and interpreting as communicative activity: (a) the historical roles of translations and interpreters, (b) translation as a change agent, (c) language access as justice, and (d) technology as a solution to language barriers. Translators traditionally claim an invisible, passive, conduit role to legitimize their work. It is assumed that the translator role is akin to a bureaucratic function. Translators may not alter the contents of business conversations and contracts, diplomatic exchanges, literature, or religious texts. Nevertheless, researchers have found that translation is not only a product of cross-cultural interactions but also a process that cannot avoid changing the language, ideology, and knowledge of both the source culture and the target culture. Language itself harbors biases and perspectives. Also, translators' strategies of foreignizing or domesticating translation can be the result of purposeful decisions, aiming to shape the cultural consciousness of the target culture. Early studies of the impact of translation centered on the use of translation in enforcing and imposing the hierarchical superiority and worldviews of the dominant culture of the colonizers, including proselytizing activities. Recent studies, however, have also argued that translations can be a form of resistance and activism. For example, the translation movement in Ireland at the turn of the 20th century was an important factor in Ireland's independence.

Because translation and interpretation are essential in shaping realities and defining identities in international communication, language access is viewed as the prerequisite to ensure a fair trial and due process in international courts. The history of the "language battle" in the Paris Peace Conference and the subsequent development of simultaneous interpreting demonstrate that interpreters are not passive participants but active collaborators, working with other participants to meet the objectives of both ideological and communicative activities.

Finally, technology allows individuals, and not just nations or large institutions, to afford and have access to professional translation and interpretation services for the first time in history. The rise of machine translation and machine learning has transformed the landscape and possibilities of translation and interpreting activities. Technology has the potential to influence not only translation and interpretation but also the larger human/ cultural consciousnesses in international communication. The perspective or worldview embedded in a language can be enshrined in artificial intelligence and machine programming.

Language Barriers in International Communication

Language barriers and cultural differences are inherent in all forms of international communication. As communication crosses borders, ethnic groups, and cultural groups, international communication inevitably needs to address differences in cultures and languages. Culture and language are intertwined. Nevertheless, sharing the same culture does not necessarily mean sharing the same language (e.g., French Canadians and English Canadians in Canada), and vice versa (e.g., Although China and Taiwan have both adopted Mandarin Chinese as their official language, they do not share the same political system— communism vs. democracy—and values). Rather than delving into the complicated and nuanced interrelationship between language and culture in international communication, this article will focus on issues related to the roles and functions of translators and interpreters in international communication.

Controversies involving translators and interpreters in international communication are not uncommon. For instance, during President Clinton's live television address when he visited Vietnam in 2000, most of his uncontroversial remarks were rendered clearly. However, the translation became garbled when Clinton touched on human rights, making the message incomprehensible to many Vietnamese (Cernetig, 2000). For example, Clinton's words, "In our experience, guaranteeing the right to religious worship and the right to political dissent does not threaten the stability of the society; instead it builds people's confidence in the fairness of the institution," became "According to our experience, the issue of allowing worshipping, allowing [pause] that does not affect the regime but to improve our regime." When Clinton said, "Only you can decide how to weave individual liberties and human rights into the rich and strong fabric of Vietnamese national identity," the interpretation was "Only you can decide [pause] on how to live with the issue, um, [pause] in the issue that human rights in Vietnam and in the society then you make a decision on your own."[1] In a diplomatic scene, interpreters are often invisible figures, facilitating the communication of two parties. In this incident, the role of the interpreters was uncharacteristically visible because the "mistakes" were on a disputed topic between the United States and Vietnam.

In 2013, at Nelson Mandela's memorial service, Thamsanqa Jantjie, posing as a sign language interpreter, made international headlines because he used random and incomprehensible signs and gestures when "interpreting" for U.S. President Obama and other world leaders (Saul, 2013). "He didn't use South African Sign Language. In fact, he didn't use any language. What he produced there was 100% authentic gibberish" (Macha, 2013, para. 3). Because an interpreter controls the channels of communication, neither the speaker nor the listener can easily spot a problematic performance or a breakdown in communication. Only individuals who are familiar with both languages and take the time to compare the source and target languages can be certain that a failure of communication has occurred. Even then, there may be challenges in identifying who is at fault.

In October 2018, as the United Kingdom prepared for its exit from the European Union, Brussels blamed the interpreter for Michel Barnier (European Chief Negotiator for the United Kingdom Exiting the European Union) for saying that the agreement was "within reach." According to *The Telegraph*, "European Commission sources blamed the inaccurate interpretation, which caused the pound to surge, although observers noted that Mr. Barnier had garbled his words somewhat" (Chrisp, 2018, para. 2). A commission source commented, "The English interpretation wasn't correct. He just said that we are working intensively with the objective of making decisive progress next week. He did not say that a deal was in sight" (Chrisp, 2018, para. 5).

These incidents highlight the complexity of languages, the nuances of cross-cultural communication, the unique positioning of interpreters, the challenges of international communication, and the normative expectations we hold for translators and interpreters.

Translators and Interpreters as Intermediaries

The history of translation as a profession is intimately tied to the diffusion of written documents of legal, religious, cultural, and scientific importance, shaping the emergence of national literature, the dissemination of knowledge, the reins of power, and the spread of religions (Delisle & Woodsworth, 1995). Because translators are often historically employed by governments and religious institutions, they have assumed the responsibilities of writing dictionaries. Typically, they have worked on written texts. Early translators often focused on literary or religious classics (e.g., Shakespeare, the Bible, or the Koran), which generally involves the transmission of cultural values and worldviews from the powerful to the weak. Authorship and authority overlap. While over the centuries, translators have shifted their claim to legitimacy from a passive vessel based in mythical fidelity (e.g., letting the divine spirit of the author/text speak through them, a spirit-channeling model) to active submission of their subjectivity, interpreters' arduous and meticulous efforts in defining their role in the translation process are inseparable from their desire to retain the authority of their translated work (Robinson, 2014). Translators found legitimacy for their translated work by assuming and claiming an invisible role (i.e., this is what the Bible said, rather than this is how "I" understood or interpreted it). The formation of the ideology of translator-as-conduit can be attributed to the historical roles and activities of translators. Rather than treating translation as an activity in which translators *can* and *do* play multiple functions, these translators are source text–oriented, focusing on issues of accuracy, translatability, and information loss as

one relays information from one language to another (Budick & Iser, 1996). The primary criteria for assessing the quality of a translator's work are equivalences between the source and target texts and the fidelity to the text (Bell, 1996).

In short, translations are viewed as reproductions of the source text rather than the product of a collaboration (conscious or not) between the translators, the author, and the readers. Norman R. Shapiro, a celebrated translator, once explained, "I see translation as the attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated. A good translation is like a pane of glass. You only notice that it's there when there are little imperfections—scratches, bubbles. Ideally, there shouldn't be any. It should never call attention to itself" (Venuti, 2017, p. 1). The traditional ideologies of translation impose a very restrictive role for professional translators: be faithful to the original text, choose the correct vocabulary, and be neutral in the process of interpretation. This role casts the translator as an information-transferring device, a *conduit* who exists to simply render the meaning of the source text to the target text as if a perfectly equivalent word, sentence, or meaning exists in both languages. While theorists may debate about the amount and types of control a translator may assert in the translation process, translators invariably work hard to hide their subjectivity, influence, and visibility in their final product (Lathey, 2010; Robinson, 2014; Venuti, 2017). Thus, the complexity and hidden agendas embedded in the process and product of translated work are obscured to its consumers. Nevertheless, "[T]ranslation is a cultural phenomenon produced by individuals with a certain personality as well as an agenda, and it is closely linked to the political and often economic or personal situation of the translator. The translator is an agent and plays an active, performative role, always in political contexts" (von Flotow, 2001, p. 13).

Translators who work on oral translation are called interpreters. The emergence of interpretation can be traced to ancient Egypt, Rome, and Greece (Delisle & Woodsworth, 1995; Roland, 1999). Before 1950, interpreters generally worked in face-to-face, one-on-one interactions. In contrast to the historical roles and functions of translators, who were often highly educated, early interpreters were often viewed as nonprofessionals (e.g., bilingual aides, bilingual guides, go-betweens, or bilingual helpers; Wadensjö, 1998). Despite their importance in cross-cultural encounters (e.g., missionary work, commerce, and power and territorial expansion), before the 17th century, these "nonprofessional" interpreters often were slaves, kidnapped natives of the newly explored or conquered regions, who were forced to learn the language of their abductors (Bowen, Bowen, Kaufmann, & Kurz, 1995; Karttunen, 1994). When Christopher Columbus's supply ship returned to Europe, he sent six Indians "who were to learn Spanish so that they might interpret for future expeditions" (Roland, 1999, p. 58). To reduce the escape of interpreters, Columbus even brought his captives' wives abroad so that the men would not leave (Kurz, 1990).

Despite the low social status of these interpreters, the value of their work did not go unnoticed by the powerful. When examining the role of African interpreters in the Atlantic slave trade, Fayer (2003) noted that interpreters played critical functions (e.g., communicating orders and suppressing slave insurrections on the slave ships, and teaching and assimilating newly arrived slaves on the plantations) because the Europeans and Americans did not feel the need to "learn the language of the people they believed to be inferior" (p. 292). These African interpreters could be so valuable on slave ships that they were "in many ways more important than the sailors" (Thomas, 1997, p. 404). In a

documented incident, fearing an insurrection of slaves, a ship captain allowed an African interpreter to punish a sailor by "three- or four and twenty lashes" because the sailor taunted the slave/interpreter, recommending that he be sold in Barbados (Thomas, 1997, p. 404).

In summary, translators and interpreters serve as intermediaries, providing means of communication between two linguistic systems, which have often entailed differences in values, worldviews, norms, and power. They are essential actors in the expansion of cultural, religious, and political regimes in international communication. The communicative contexts in which they provide services often entail significant power differences between the source and target systems. As such, translators and interpreters are in a unique position to monitor, encourage, facilitate, or resist the assimilation and control of the target audience by the source system. To legitimate their work and to maintain authority in the performance, translators often claim an invisible role despite their active control in the process of communication. Nevertheless, their claim of invisibility does not accurately represent or reflect their actual practices (Hsieh, 2016). While translators and interpreters "were once seen as transparent conduits at best, or traitors at worst" (von Flotow, 2001, p. 13), researchers and theorists across disciplines increasingly recognized their power to exert control over the communicative processes as well as the rippling effects of their strategic interventions.

Translation as a Change Agent

Translation is not only a product of cross-cultural interactions but also an entity that is capable of changing the language, ideology, and knowledge of both the source culture and the target culture (Gal, 2015). Translation illuminates both the cultural otherness at stake in nationhood and the epistemological otherness at work in the language itself (Bermann, 2005). Briggs (1998) argued that language ideologies and normative values are created, legitimized, and challenged as discourse is produced and circulated. The final product of translation is not a neutral or value-free product that conveys the "real" message of the source text. Rather, it reflects the underlying interests and competence of its creator (e.g., the work was chosen to be translated or the corresponding term that is deemed to be the equivalence can involve political, rather than linguistic, decisions). Translation is a tool that is actively involved in the transference, control, and perseverance of cultural values, knowledge, and power. As Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) pointed out:

> European missionization and colonization of other continents entailed control of speakers and their vernaculars. Recent research on colonial linguistic description and translation has addressed the ideological dimension of dictionaries, grammars, and language guides, demonstrating that what was conceived as a neutral scientific endeavor was very much a political one. (p. 68)

Hybridization highlights the political nature of translation. A hybrid text is a feature of contemporary intercultural communication that results from cultures and languages being in contact. Schäffner and Adab (1997) explained:

A hybrid text is a text that results from a translation process. It shows features that somehow seem "out of place"/"strange"/"unusual" for the receiving culture (i.e., the target culture). These features, however, are not the result of a lack of translational competence or examples of "translationese," but they are evidence of conscious and deliberate decisions by the translator. Although the text is not yet fully established in the target culture (because it does not conform to established norms and conventions), a hybrid text is accepted in its target culture because it fulfills its intended purpose in the communicative situation (at least for a certain time). (p. 325)

As early as the 1930s, Bakhtin (1981) proposed the concept of hybridization when discussing the artistic imagery of the languages in novels. Bakhtin defined hybridization as "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter. . . . between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor" (p. 358). For Bakhtin, an intentional artistic hybrid is not something that exists in abstract but as a "semantics that is concrete and social" (p. 360). Although Bakhtin's conceptualization of hybridization was based on the linguistic representations in novels and was not particularly concerned with the hybridization of two *different* languages (as opposed to two social languages), as in the case of translation, he pointed out three important characteristics of hybridization: (a) hybridization is one of the most important modes in the historical life and evolution of all languages; (b) hybridization is historically the primary means that cause languages to change; and (c) hybridization is not only a mixture of different speech styles but, more importantly, a mixture of different worldviews and perspectives. These three characteristics are significant because hybridization in this sense is not, and could not, be an isolated act of an individual but a collaborative action taken by the creators and audiences of hybrid texts.

It has potentially profound consequences insofar as interlinguistic communication involves the comparison and understanding of what Wilhelm von Humboldt, Johann Gottfried Herder, and later Noam Chomsky understood as syntactical structuration of communication. The confrontation between two patterns of syntactical structuration poses a challenge not only for bridging the gap but also such that the difference exposes what had previously been an invisible bias in communication/understanding. Well before the work of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, Friedrich Nietzsche argued, "conscious thinking *takes the form of words, which is to say signs of communication*, and this fact uncovers the origin of consciousness. In brief, the development of language and the development of consciousness (not of reason but merely of the way reason enters consciousness) go hand in hand" (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 299). Hence, the work of translators and interpreters involves the hybridization of consciousness and its product, linguist human reality that involves spatial and temporal understanding as well as values, assumptions, and beliefs (Hymes, 1971). Insofar as the control of what is real is a form of power, then control of language use is a political process. Throughout history, many colonizing powers have understood this.

Indeed, hybridizations often occur in regions where cross-cultural influences are strong, such as colonial societies or large trading centers, creating pidgin and Creole languages, idioms combining elements of several distinct languages (Hanks, 1996). Hybridization does not simply occur and is not a random use of languages. Hybridization is introduced to and accepted by the target culture for historical reasons, fulfilling specific needs (e.g., social,

cultural, intellectual, or political needs) of users of the target culture. Through hybridization, a new sociocultural world is formed. The worldviews of the users of the hybrids evolve, including new frames of reference. The blending of the languages leads to users of hybrids increasingly relying on new, novel frames of reference, new values that are embedded in the hybridization.

Other researchers have made similar observations, noting that domesticating, exoticizing, and foreignizing translation should be understood in the political contexts in which the translation is produced. Translators often actively incorporate a personal agenda (e.g., resisting the dominant values, preserving the target culture, or expanding the conceptual framework of the target culture) into their translation strategies (Gupta, 1998). According to Venuti (2017), whereas exoticizing creates a "superficial sense of differences that can easily play into cultural or ethnic stereotypes," domesticating or foreignizing translation is not simply a matter of verbal choices or discursive strategies adopted by translators but reflects a translator's management of the linguistic and cultural hierarchies within sociopolitical contexts. Venuti (2017) explained:

> Domesticating translation not only validates dominant resources and ideologies, but also extends their dominance over a text written in a different language and culture, assimilating its differences to receiving materials. [. . . It] maintains the status quo, reaffirming linguistic standards, literary canons, and authoritative interpretations, fostering among readers who esteem such resources and ideologies a cultural narcissism that is sheer self-satisfaction. [. . .] Foreignizing translation, in drawing on marginal resources and ideologies, carries the potential to challenge the dominant, as well as the cultural and social hierarchies that structure the receiving situation. It seeks to respect the differences of the source text, but because the translation is inevitably domesticating in enacting an assimilative process, those differences can be signaled only through the indirect means of deviating from the dominant by employing the marginal. Foreignizing translation is most effective when it is innovative, when it departs from institutionalized knowledge and practices by stimulating new kinds of thinking and writing, making a difference that is creative. (p. xiv)

In other words, translators' choices in domesticating or foreignizing their work have ethical effects, reflecting their active stance in reinforcing or resisting the values and worldviews of the target culture.

By recognizing the political nature and ethical implications of translation, researchers have examined how translations can create major cultural shifts in pivotal points of time in history (Blumenfeld-Kosinski, von Flotow, & Russell, 2001; Rafael, 1993). For example, the shift from Latin to vernacular in translation implies a translator's deliberate and often strategic choice to reach a broader audience, supported by secular rulers and religious leaders, in complex cultural fields (Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 2001). In Middle Ages Europe, while some groups aimed to

preserve their privileges of Latin learning in order to safeguard their roles as intercessors with the divine, others succeeded in exploiting the translation of Latin texts for their own purposes: for example, laying claim to legitimate rule by inventing illustrious lineage, vouched for by the authority of the ancient texts.

(Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 2001, p. 25)

Similarly, for early Spanish intellectuals and theologians, Castilian translations of ancient, sacred Latin texts adopted Latin's grammatical and rhetorical structure while heavily employing vernaculars to achieve specific political–theological objectives: "[T]he vernacular is thus mythologized as a return—one might even say conversion—to Latin insofar as the language of antiquity continued to exemplify the means to convey the gravity of the same truth" (Rafael, 1993, pp. 25–26). In other words, the translations legitimized the Castilian vernacular, making it "the language of the empire" (Rafael, 1993). When Spanish missionaries arrived in Tagalog society in the Philippines for colonization and Christian conversion, translations heavily relied on Latin and Castilian as the principal points of references: relying on Latin grammar and Castilian discourse, the missionaries transformed Tagalog into a useful tool for translation and Christian conversion. As Tagalog natives learned about Christianity, they inevitably embraced the inherent hierarchies of languages: Latin as the privileged language of the Catholic Church and of God's laws, and Castilian as the master language to which Tagalog was subjugated (Rafael, 1993).

While early studies of the impact of translation centered on the use of translation in enforcing and imposing the hierarchical superiority and worldview of a dominant culture onto the colonized, recent studies have also argued that translations can be a form of resistance and activism. For example, German translators such as August Wilhelm Schlegel and Friedrich Schleiermacher at the turn of the 19th century, and Chinese translators such as Yan Fu, Lin Shu, and Lu Xun at the turn of the 20th century, actively engaged in translational activities that aimed at "language reform, cultural change, and nation building" (Tymoczko, 2010, p. 14). They were activists who believed that translations were instrumental to "improve their societies, helping their cultures take new directions and adapt to new conditions" (Tymoczko, 2010, p. 14). From this perspective, the dominant culture that the translators aimed to challenge was the worldviews of target cultures. Translations were used to introduce differences with the goal of generating cultural shifts in target cultures.

It is important to note that despite the shared agenda to facilitate cultural change, translators do not necessarily agree on the scope of the changes required. For example, Lin Shu (1852–1924), an influential translator at the turn of the 20th century in China, knew no foreign languages. Nevertheless, by collaborating with 20 assistants trained in different languages who provided oral interpretations of the texts, Lin Shu completed over 180 translations of Western literary works into classical Chinese (Hill, 2013). While recognizing the importance of introducing Western ideas, Lin Shu believed that Chinese language and its classical format should be retained, preferring domesticating translation (Sun, 2002). In contrast, Lu Xun (1881–1936), one of the most important intellectuals in modern China and a contemporary of translator Lin Shu, insisted that foreignizing translation, including adopting the Western grammatical structure, was necessary to enhance the complexity and nuances of the Chinese language (Sun, 2002).

Moving beyond Venuti's argument that foreignizing translation is a form of resistance (i.e., a reactive view of activism), other researchers have proposed that translators and translations have assumed active roles in cultural movements (e.g., Gupta, 1998; Tymoczko, 2010). For example, the translations of early Irish literature into English at the turn of the 20th century were critical in shaping Ireland's resistance to England, resulting in political actions and political confrontations to achieve Ireland's (partial) independence. Led by prominent Irish cultural figures, the translations demonstrated the "existence of an independent Irish culture and had an important impact on identity formation at the time" (Tymoczko, 2010, p. 17). "Responding to the dual pressures of colonialism and nationalism," the translations portrayed the Irish as "tragic, heroic, militant, noble and chaste" (Tymoczko, 2000, p. 42). These translations aimed to redefine and reshape the national identity of the Irish state as well as the cultural identity of Ireland. In a powerful turn, the marginalized forced the powerful to recognize their existence and reclaimed their identity as distinct from that of their colonizer.

However, the success of the translation movement in Ireland also led to unanticipated whiplashes (Tymoczko, 2000, 2010). The skewed nationalist representation of early Irish culture later contributed to a problematic mythos about Irish identity. The heroism in translations was later transformed into an ethos of violence in Northern Ireland that both the IRA and the Unionists subscribed to during the Troubles in the second half of the 20th century. Through Irish laws, the Catholic Church explicitly defined women's role as homebound and associated with traditional values, making Ireland one of the most regressive and repressive states for women in Western Europe. Tymoczko (2010, p. 17) concluded, "Ireland became a victim of its own translational self-representation and self-construction."

In summary, translation is not a passive channel through which two linguistic systems communicate with one another. Translations are situated in the sociopolitical contexts in which they are produced. The creation of translation and the corresponding discursive strategies (e.g., hybridization, domestication, and foreignization) imply hierarchies in highly contested fields. Traditional studies have examined translation as a site and a tool for the powerful (e.g., colonizers) to claim their authority and superiority while exerting control and forcing assimilation of the weak, transforming the cultural consciousness of the target culture. However, the transformative power of translation is not a unidirectional process. Rather, it is a dialectical, communicative process. Translation can be a resource for and a product of resistance and activism, challenging the dominant culture from within by creating new points of reference. The authors, target audiences, and translators (and publishers) engage in dynamic processes in negotiating and constructing meanings. As new points of reference are established and embraced, new meanings emerge and, in turn, reshape the realities of both source and target cultures (see also Hsieh & Kramer, 2021).

Language Access as Justice

The rise of professional interpreting, as we know it today, is closely tied to international justice. Professional interpreting first emerged around 1920, after languages other than French were recognized as official diplomatic languages. Before World War I (1914–1918), French was the only official diplomatic language. For example, at the Congress of Vienna in 1814–1815, the participants were "either diplomats with a perfect knowledge of French, or high ranking officers who had been selected expressly because they knew French" (Gaiba,

1998, p. 28). At the time, international communication between institutions speaking different languages was carried out primarily through written translations (Gaiba, 1998). However, during World War I (WWI), diplomats would perform consecutive, sentence-by-sentence interpreting because some negotiators from the United States and the United Kingdom were not familiar with French. Later, during the preliminaries of the Paris Peace Conference, the United Kingdom, as a victor of WWI, insisted on the recognition of English as an official language (Delisle & Woodsworth, 1995). MacMillan (2002) described the "language battle":

> The French argued for their language alone, ostensibly on the grounds that it was more precise and at the same time capable of greater nuance. French, they said, had been the language of international communication and diplomacy for centuries. The British and the Americans pointed out the English was increasingly supplanting it. Lloyd George [who represented the U.K. delegation] said that he would always regret that he did not know French better (he scarcely knew it at all), but it seemed absurd that English, spoken by more than 170 million people, should not have equal status with French. The Italians said, in that case, why not Italian as well? "Otherwise," said Snnoino [from the Italian delegation], "it would look as if Italy was being treated as an inferior by being excluded." In that case, said Lloyd George, why not Japanese as well. The Japanese delegates, who tended to have trouble following the debates whether they were in French or English, remained silent. (pp. 55–56)

The political nature and the implications of official languages were salient to the representatives in the Paris Peace Conference. Eventually, it was agreed that all diplomatic matters could be discussed either in French or in English. It was ironic that Paris was the location where French lost its privileged status as the language of diplomacy (Delisle, 2014). This decision also opened the door for multilingualism in international organizations and communication, creating a permanent need for translations and interpretations (Delisle & Woodsworth, 1995; Gaiba, 1998).

The first specific training initiatives (i.e., note-taking in consecutive interpreting) were associated with the interpreters working at the League of Nations in 1920 after WWI (Pöchhacker, 2016). With the emergence of training programs and schools for interpreters in Germany in 1930s, and later in early 1940s in Geneva and Vienna, a new form of interpreting (i.e., simultaneous interpreting) played a crucial and prominent role in 1945 during the International Military Tribunal (also known as the Nuremberg Tribunal) against leading Nazi war criminals after WWII) (Gaiba, 1998; Pöchhacker, 2016). International criminal justice often involves multilingual courtroom proceedings. This development raised concerns about the impact of language diversity on the process and nature of fair hearing (Namakula, 2014). Translation, multiculturalism, and human rights became intertwined issues, imposing duties upon courts to ensure fairness and due process through language access to all participants in the judicial processes (Namakula, 2014). Scholars and jurists also recognized that justice, fairness, and the legitimacy of the judicial processes could not be established without addressing the pervasive impact of language barriers and interpreters.

Prior to the Nuremberg Trial, interpreters typically provided in-person interpreting through a consecutive mode or through whisper interpreting (i.e., whispering simultaneously in the client's ears) in judicial settings (Delisle & Woodsworth, 1995). However, such interpreting

modes were not appropriate for the Nuremberg Trial because of the unique characteristics of the trial and the specific constraints obligated by the Charter of the International Military Tribunal (n.d.; Gaiba, 1998). From the very beginning, the Tribunal recognized that language access was essential to fairness, without which there could be no justice (Namakula, 2014). According to the Charter, the defendants had a right to a fair trial, which involved a prerequisite that all proceedings be translated into a language that the defendants understood (i.e., Articles 16 and 25). Article 25 of the Charter states:

> All official documents shall be produced, and all court proceedings conducted, in English, French and Russian, and in the language of the Defendant. So much of the record and of the proceedings may also be translated into the language of any country in which the Tribunal is sitting, as the Tribunal is sitting, as the Tribunal considers desirable in the interests of the justice and public opinion.
>
> (Charter of the International Military Tribunal, n.d.)

Justice Robert H. Jackson, the chief prosecutor, explained the challenges in establishing legitimacy and justice if language barriers were not effectively resolved (Gaiba, 1998, p. 34; Namakula, 2014, p. 8):

> I think there is no problem that has given me as much trouble and as much discouragement as this problem of trying to conduct a trial in four languages. I think it has the greatest danger from the point of view of impression this trial will make upon the public. Unless this problem is solved, the trial will be such a confusion of tongues that it will be ridiculous, and I fear ridicule much more than hate.

Without a new form of interpreting, the trial time would minimally double, and the trial process could become chaotic and problematic (e.g., interpreters of five languages whispering at the same time, overlapping and interfering with other speakers' and interpreters' talk). Such conditions would impose a significant challenge to another Charter requirement: the court proceedings and the punishment of perpetrators had to be carried out "as expeditiously as possible, in order to reduce costs and time, and to keep the attention of the public and the media" (Gaiba, 1998, p. 32).

In response, a new modality of interpreting was invented because it was necessary to achieve justice and in an efficient fashion: interpreters of different languages performed interpreting simultaneously by speaking into a microphone at remote booths, outside the view of the speakers and audience members, while the participants of the Trial relied on headphones to understand each other's talk in real time. This allowed jurists and defendants to participate in the court proceedings as if it was spoken in a single language, interacting and interjecting with one another in a timely manner (Delisle & Woodsworth, 1995). Soon after the Nuremberg Trial, simultaneous interpretation was introduced to the United Nations and to most major international conferences (Gaiba, 1998).

Recognizing that interpreters are not passive tools to be wielded to "communicate" with others who do not share the same language and that interpreting is situated in a larger communicative event, jurists began to adapt the Nuremberg model—its norms and the communicative style—to ensure effective and appropriate communication. For example, a

study of the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal after WWII found that interpreting norms was a negotiated result through "trial and error" between preferred judicial norms and the pragmatic constraints of court interpreting (Takeda, 2010). Unlike their European counterparts, the Japanese interpreters were not professionally trained and had difficulties in interpreting in the consecutive mode that involves long, uninterrupted talk. In response, the new tribunal norm (e.g., breaking remarks into shorter segments) was negotiated and changed to accommodate the interpreters' needs. In addition, three groups of linguists, different ethnically and socially, were employed to ensure the quality of interpreting: Japanese nationals who interpreted the proceedings, Japanese Americans who monitored the interpreters' performance, and Caucasian U.S. military officers who acted as arbiters in interpreting and translation disputes (Takeda, 2010).

When examining the evolution of forms, formats, and training of professional interpreters in the 20th century, it is important to recognize that professional interpreting and the judicial system stand at a reciprocal, dialectic relationship. As language diversity is incorporated and recognized in international diplomacy and international justice systems, interpreters became increasingly essential to the maintenance of fairness and the legitimacy of justice. Interpreters are trained and interpreting modalities are developed in response to fit the contextual demands and pragmatic constraints of specific communicative events. In other words, interpreters and interpreting modalities are not readily available tools to address language barriers in international communication; rather, they are meticulously trained/ developed and carefully calibrated to address the challenges of language barriers of specific communicative activities. At the same time, other participants have also actively modified their communicative behaviors and norms to address the pragmatic constraints of the interpreting activities. Together, interpreters and all other participants collaboratively work to achieve an image (if not the actual outcome) that is in "the interests of justice and public opinion," legitimizing the process and outcome of the trials.

Because of the demanding skills required for simultaneous interpretation, these interpreters are highly trained, extremely well educated, and well disciplined. Because the development of interpreting is heavily intertwined with laws, international politics, and the justice system, the development of theories, professionalism, and codes of conduct in interpretation has been associated with neutrality, detachment, and faithfulness to the original utterances. Due to the nature of their interpreting tasks, such interpreters have typically claimed an invisible conduit role, emphasizing that their personal views and "interpretation" are not involved in the interpreted texts whether they interpreted for war crime criminals, politicians, or any other speakers.

Studies on interpreters' impact on judicial proceedings, however, have highlighted complexities of court interpreting. While the traditional view of court interpreting casts interpreters as passive conduits, recent studies have demonstrated interpreters' active role in judicial proceedings. For example, even though simultaneous interpreting was viewed as the ideal model in multilingual courtrooms, researchers have found that interpreters often adopt strategies to condense and modify a speaker's talk in order to keep up with the speakers' narratives with minimal lag time. Different cultures also often involve different linguistic norms (e.g., reported speech, indirect speech, or idioms) that can cause misunderstanding if the speakers' narratives are interpreted verbatim. Finally, interpreters face unique challenges when they need to relay concepts or ways of speaking that do not exist in both linguistic

systems (e.g., honorary personal address terms). Researchers have found that interpreters adopt systematic changes to speakers' narratives that alter speakers' identities, firmness in beliefs, and other characteristics, resulting in differences in jury perceptions (Berk-Seligson, 2017). Interpreters' discursive strategies reflect their active management of both the speaker's intention and the listeners' understanding with the objectives of "identifying misunderstandings, elucidating contexts, investigation intentions, and clarifying meaning explicitly" (Morris, 1995, p. 32). Nevertheless, interpreters' active management over the meanings of speaker narratives can present significant challenges and dilemmas to the law, highlighting the uncertainties, ambiguities, and inadequacies inherent in court interpreting (Morris, 1995; Shlesinger & Pöchhacker, 2010).

In conclusion, because of the power of language, translation and interpretation are inherently political acts. The consequences of the political tensions are heightened in judicial proceedings in which all discursive strategies are carefully constructed to control both expressed and implied meanings. The mere presence of interpreters, however, does not guarantee justice. International courts have recognized that fair trials and due process are a coordinated, collaborative product requiring accommodations from all participants as well as tribunal norms. More importantly, despite interpreters' and the laws' interests to portray interpreters as invisible, passive, and neutral, recent studies have found that interpreters systematically alter their discursive strategies in response to their evaluation of the communicative contexts and speakers' narratives and intent. Despite the uneasy tension between the pragmatics of court interpreting and the ideals of fairness and justice, interpreters have been at the forefront in shaping and doing international justice.

Technology as a Solution to Language Barriers

One of the most important and profound changes in translation and interpretation in relation to international communication is the role of technology. Technology has provided new possibilities to address language barriers. More importantly, technology allows individuals, and not just nations or large institutions, to afford and to have access to professional translation and interpretation services for the first time in history. In the foreseeable future, technology has the potential not only to influence how translations and interpretations are conducted but also how human/cultural consciousnesses are influenced in international communications.

Technology has been central to the growth and development of human communication. The creation of media (e.g., paper, telecommunication, and mobile phones) provides new ways of communication, passing information across greater distances of time and space. The earlier discussions on the development of electronic equipment for simultaneous interpreting after WWII highlight the complex, dialectic relationships between communicative activities, interpreting/translation activities, the participants, the larger society, and technology.

Some of the biggest changes in translation and interpretation have been facilitated by the affordability and availability of technology. For example, telephone interpreting made highly trained professional interpreters available and affordable by charging callers pay-by-minute fees. While some proposed the use of the telephone as a medium to provide interpreting as early as the 1950s, it was not until 1973 when the Department of Immigration of Australia

first provided telephone interpreting services to individuals who could not be reached by in-person interpreters (Kelly & Pöchhacker, 2015). In the United States, volunteer service for telephone interpreting was founded in 1982 in California to assist law enforcement personnel with professional interpreters (LanguageLine Solutions, 2020a). The service was later acquired by AT&T and became known as LanguageLine, which became a popular solution for both the public and private sectors. By 2018, LanguageLine Solutions (now an independent entity) boasted having 11,000+ interpreters available, providing 35 million annual calls, and serving 28,000 clients in more than 240 languages, 24/7/365 (LanguageLine Solutions, 2020a). More importantly, the average connection time is 16.1 seconds for phone interpreting and 24.8 seconds for video-interpreting—their trained linguists can even identify the languages needed when the callers are uncertain about which language interpreter should be requested (LanguageLine Solutions, 2020b). The scale and availability of mobile technologies have also had a critical impact on international and domestic commerce as businesses can now easily provide services at any time in any location to consumers who do not share the same language.

Telephone interpreting has become a billion-dollar business and is provided in numerous countries by both international and local agencies (Kelly & Pöchhacker, 2015). Ozolins (2011) noted that the declining cost of fixed-line telephones, the rise of mobile telephonic technology, and the spread of Internet-based voice communications are critical in allowing service providers to control cost by tapping into the large global market while relying on interpreters located at remote (and international) locations.

Technology has formed and organized pools of translators and interpreters. The availability of an international pool of interpreters and translators, however, can also entail unique challenges and unprecedented changes. For example, whereas translators and interpreters in previous generations were individuals who were often bilingual and bicultural sojourners, modern technology has made it possible for people to learn a foreign language without ever leaving their home countries. As a result, a service provider may use an Indian–English interpreter who has never left India to interpret for Indians living in the United Kingdom, the United States, or Australia (Kelly, 2007). Similarly, translation agencies in developed countries can cut costs by outsourcing translation to translators in developing countries rather than hiring locally. However, a lack of cultural competence among translators who have little to no foreign experience is not lost on service providers as some service providers emphasize using only local linguists to ensure the quality of translation/interpretation. After all, without a sound knowledge of the subtle but crucial differences in linguistic and cultural norms, problematic communication can be easily disguised as seemingly smooth or fluent translation/interpretation.

Finally, the rise of machine translation and natural language processing in the era of big data is likely to define the future of translation and interpretation in the coming years. Artificial intelligence is also helping to make translation and interpretation more available. It is important to note that machine translation is not new as translators have long embraced the use of computer-assisted technologies to ensure consistency in translation. In fact, the European Commission has been an early investor in machine translation (Poibeau, 2017). Creating a standard list of terminologies and corresponding translations allows interpreters to maintain consistency across different paragraphs, documents, and even languages (Poibeau, 2017). In the mid-1980s, it was generally believed that fully automated high-quality

translation of unrestricted texts was not going be achievable in the near future due to the complexity of lexical ambiguity, syntactic ambiguity, and subtleties of translation in cross-cultural contexts (Somers, 2011). However, a paradigm shift in machine translation provided a radically new way of doing machine translation in the late 1980s (Somers, 2011).

Moving away from the linguistic rule–based approach, the success of speech recognition has made researchers consider a statistics-based approach: creating translations through machine learning based on a statistical analysis of previous translations. Somers (2011) explained, "[The statistics-based approach] is based on the idea that a computer program can 'learn' how to translate by analysing huge amounts of data from previous translations and then assessing statistical probabilities to decide how to translate a new input. Depending on your prejudices, this counterintuitive approach works surprisingly well, or unsurprisingly badly" (p. 430). More recently, shifting away from the statistical model, neural machine translation (adopted by Google Translate in 2016) has further transformed the field. The neural machine translation aims at building "a single neural network" that can be "jointly trained to maximize the probability of a correct translation given a source sentence" (Bahdanau, Cho, & Bengio, 2016, p. 1). As of 2018, Google Translate offers free online and offline services in 100+ languages, with varying quality and features depending on the language pair used. Google Translate allows any person with access to a mobile phone or a computer to type, write, talk, or even snap a picture of texts in a language and receive an automated translation or interpretation immediately. Recently, Google Translate adopts a "see" function, allowing users to use their mobile phone's camera to see instant translations.

As a result of the emerging approaches to machine translation, one can speculate that entities that have control or ownership of the initial (and the largest) corpus of data and the corresponding translations or the "single neural network" are likely to define and shape future translation and interpretation. In addition to governmental efforts, various multinational corporations are competing to obtain natural linguistic data by offering free translation services, such as Google Translate and Microsoft Bing Translator. In addition, the convergence of various forms of technology (e.g., speech, graphic, and text recognition; mobile communication; and even smart home applications) will allow the owners of these linguistic data to have unprecedented access to language use in naturalistic settings and a wide range of contexts. As we increase in computing power to process big data, we can anticipate a new age of machine translation.

It is important to note that technology is likely to transform the landscape of translation and interpretation *and* international communication with unforeseen consequences. Some researchers argued that machine translation and its future evolution is likely to be shaped by the economic potential of its users (e.g., Arabic and Chinese are among the most intensively researched languages in machine translation; Poibeau, 2017). As such, it is possible that technology may worsen disparities and inequities around the world as the powerful and the rich are likely to have access to better quality translation and interpretation, resulting in greater access to information and resources. Others have warned that cultural biases and discrimination can be perpetuated when we rely on self-learning artificial intelligence (AI) to provide automated translations because biases are often inherent in languages and our linguistic practices (Zou & Schiebinger, 2018). AI's machine-learning and deep-learning algorithms have "deterministic functionality and will pick up any tendencies that already exist in the data they train on" (Dickson, 2018, p. 94). Because data availability is unlikely to be

equally distributed between different countries/cultures, the countries or entities with better control and availability of data are likely to shape the performance (or consciousness) of AI, which will eventually shape the perceived reality of those who rely on AI to understand the world. Rather than creating a language barrier–free utopia, machine translation has the potential of reinforcing disparities and prejudices that benefit the powerful but not the weak.

Finally, unlike previous translation and interpretation that allows researchers (and their users) to reasonably trace the hidden agenda or politics that shaped the outcome of the translated work, machine translation is controlled by complex algorithms that may be beyond the control or even awareness of its owners and users. While the carefully crafted translation and interpretation motivated by translators' or governments' agendas may be a thing of the past, it is important to recognize that machine translation is not without political and ethical implications.

The reliance on big data to train and perfect machine translation through "a single neural network" suggests that even the programmers of the algorithms are unlikely to know where the network starts and where it ends. An utterance spoken in Beijing, China, yesterday can shape the English–Chinese translation in Cape Town, South Africa, today, and without the active management of a person. The change is only known to AI. As a result, machine translation can evolve in ways that are not controlled or monitored effectively and appropriately by either the software programmers or the machine translation's users. Its inherent bias and prejudice can go unnoticed and unchecked.[2] While scholars can point to Latin and Castilian as the principal points of references for Tagalog translations (Rafael, 1993), it would be almost impossible to trace where and what serves as the machine translation's principal points of references. That does not mean that there are no points of reference in machine translations. Rather, it is just that they are hidden in the complex algorithms and the large amount of data from which AI has derived its learning. At times, even the creators of AI have been surprised by AI's prejudice, not knowing how such biases were introduced into the process and how to resolve the problem (Dickson, 2018).

In addition, a malicious programmer can inject prejudices and biases to secretly influence its users' attitudes and worldviews without notice. It is also unclear whether the "neural network" will be able to appreciate and differentiate the linguistic and cultural subtleties in countries that share the same language but not the same culture (or language users who share the same culture but not the same language). Without recognizing the differences, machine translation is likely to create a standardized cultural consciousness that transcends time, space, countries, and ethnicity. Language inevitably frames our understanding of the world. If governments, publishers, translators, and even programmers cannot have full control over the cultural consciousness framed through machine translation, who is framing our cultural consciousness? All becomes a giant reduction to statistical averages. Can AI control our cultural consciousness and worldviews without our full knowledge and awareness of its influences?

Throughout human history, the diversity of languages has been maintained by and celebrated through localized creativity and differences. The richness of multiple human worlds is possible because of the process of isolation, separation, integration, and fusion between cultural groups and speech communities over thousands of years. The diversity is essential to the complexity and richness of our cultural consciousness and innovative thinking.

Phenomenologists have long foreseen that a rule-based linguistic approach to machine translation is inadequate to accommodate the complexity and creativity inherent in human languages. A statistics-based approach to machine translation assumes that the most frequent expression is the best expression, an assumption that can be easily debunked by good literary work in any language. A machine translation relying on a "single neural network" or a mathematical model is likely to minimize, if not destroy, any nuance and subtlety that can only be fostered and thrive in local communities situated in unique sociohistorical, sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socioenvironmental contexts.

As much as we train the machines to learn our talk, we inevitably change the way we talk and who we are. Just like the jurists who changed the ways they talked in the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal to improve the quality of interpreting, we change the ways we talk and think to ensure greater efficiency when working with AI (McGarry, 2017; Shulevitz, 2018). Turkle (2012), a leading expert on technology and communication, eloquently critiqued the phenomenon:

> Human relationships are rich and they're messy and they're demanding. And we clean them up with technology. And when we do, one of the things that can happen is that we sacrifice conversation for mere connection. We short-change ourselves. And over time, we seem to forget this, or we seem to stop caring. (07:03)
>
> [. . . In one of my experiments,] a woman who had lost a child was talking to a robot in the shape of a baby seal. It seemed to be looking into her eyes. It seemed to be following the conversation. It comforted her. And many people found this amazing.
>
> But that woman was trying to make sense of her life with a machine that had no experience of the arc of a human life. That robot put on a great show. And we're vulnerable. People experience pretend empathy as though it were the real thing. So during that moment when that woman was experiencing that pretend empathy, I was thinking, "That robot can't empathize. It doesn't face death. It doesn't know life." (09:55)

While machine translation represents an ambitious aspiration to remove language barriers, it is possible that humans can lose the localized, unique linguistic patterns that kept the diversity and richness of our cultural consciousness and communities alive for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Inherent in machine translation is the pursuit of efficiency through the elimination of nuances and differences. Machine translation cleans up the messiness of linguistic and cultural differences. It is an instrumental view of communication, creating a (questionable) impression of smooth communication while discarding the subtleties of cultural experiences. To achieve "efficient" machine translation, we sacrifice the complexity and diversity of human/cultural consciousness. We relay the information across different languages. We put on a great show as though we are really understanding and communicating without the burden of language barriers. But can we really understand and appreciate one another without learning and recognizing each other's' unique cultural consciousness and differences?

Will machine translation eventually teach all humans with different languages to talk and think the same way? As machines? A standardized way of thinking and talking across cultures and languages may ultimately eliminate language barriers but not necessarily create a better or richer world. If international communication is facilitated by machine translation based on a single neural network, as we share the singular cultural consciousness, is that consciousness organic and unpredictably (creatively) human or is it uncreatively a compiling of modes of thinking and talking into a single average? We may begin to mimic the machine language as a new standard more compelling than the linguistic colonialism of the past conquerors. The art of writing and conversation, which requires deviance as art, is the opposite of merely copying previous accomplishments. We learn about our own prejudices and biases when we step outside our cultural frame, using differences as the points of reference for critical and innovative thinking. If human consciousness, machine translation, and AI eventually converge into a singular frame for all understanding and communication, with minimal differences across languages and cultures, we will inevitably lose to points of reference to identify the prejudice and bias in our consciousness.

The problem of a standard mode of life and communicating is that it can become invisible. It may be efficient, but the art of living and communication will be lost. Life may become analogous to a giant factory of precise redundant operations, which would be meaningless because redundancy is meaningless and boring. Challenges in life and understanding spawn innovation. If we confuse so-called competent communication with machine translation, we will lose the most important part of competence, which is innovation. If machine translation is just one more variant among others, it will be useful and perhaps interesting as we compare the differences between the machine and human translators. If it comes to dominant communication, eliminating the differences along with the human art of translation, it will reduce the joy of communicating itself. A great translation does more than faithfully equate words between two registers. It captures the sense of the text. And as Aristotle discovered in his studies of metaphor, the essence of the art of communicating involves the fact that you can use the same words and phrases but mean different things in different contexts. Context, being a temporal phenomenon, is always changing. Hence, he was thwarted from finding the invariant forms of his teacher Plato by the ever-changing world of Heraclitus.

In conclusion, the production of translation and interpretation cannot be separated from the analysis of knowledge, reasoning, and cultural consciousness——along with the tensions inherent in the (re)production of power and cultural hierarchies. Translation and interpretation always have been and will continue to be a political act, whether it is done by a person or a machine. Technology has afforded opportunities and possibilities to address language barriers in ways unimaginable just decades ago. The Irish were caught off guard by and suffered from the redefined identities and cultural values inherent in the translations of their early literature. Similarly, the rise, availability, and pervasive applicability of machine translation can lead to unforeseen consequences and undesirable impacts—including the loss of the diversity and richness of human consciousness—only to be replaced by an efficient, singular artificial (and enigmatic) language.

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Notes

1. What makes this news even more interesting is that, according to *The New York Times* (Sanger, 2000), the U.S. government had already given the Vietnamese government a translation of Clinton's speech prior to the event because "we've learned the hard way what happens when you let your host do its own translation," a White House official said. Then, roughly two weeks later, *The Associated Press* indicated that the interpreter was actually assigned by the U.S. Embassy and the mistakes were made because the interpreter had a different accent and did not receive the updated version of Clinton's speech until the last minute (Gedda, 2000). Regardless of the cause of the problematic interpretation, the incident highlights the delicate nature of interpreting controversial topics in international communication.

2. A group of MIT researchers recently developed an "unsupervised" machine translation that runs without the need for human annotation and guidance, claiming that this "faster, more efficient computer-based translation" can open up the world's roughly 7,000 spoken languages to machine translation (Matheson, 2018).

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