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Cultural Untranslatability

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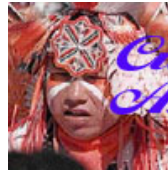
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Cultural Aspects

Cultural Untranslatability

by Kanji Kitamura

Abstract: This paper proposes a possible concept of 'cultural untranslatability' in translation, focusing on what it is, how important it is, and when it occurs. The paper first explores cultural concepts for understanding of culture. The second part examines Hofstede's cultural dimensions and establishes an experimental definition of cultural difference. Drawing on actual translations between English and Japanese, the third part discusses the importance of the concept. Finally, it considers under what circumstances such untranslatable items are *de facto* culturally untranslatable, borrowing the concept of translation norms. The paper concludes that cultural untranslatability is an important, useful concept for translation between languages with a great cultural difference, and the notion of correctness peculiar to a socio-cultural context in a specific culture is the deciding factor in cultural untranslatability.

Keywords: Culture, (un)translatability, Hofstede, norms

Abbreviations

SC: Source Language Culture
TC: Target Language Culture
SL: Source Language
TL: Target Language
ST: Source Language Text
TT: Target Language Text

Introduction

Translatability/(un)translatability is a classic yet vast and fuzzy topic; for instance, Catford (1965: 93) writes that translatability appears "intuitively, to be a *cline* rather than a clear-cut dichotomy", and "SL texts and items are *more* or *less* translatable rather than absolutely *translatable* or *untranslatable*". There are a number of possible reasons why translatability can be described like this. In addition to various differences between languages, there can be a specific need (Hatim and Mason 1989: 12) or text purpose (cf. skopos—see for instance Nord 1991: 22-30; 1997: 27-38; Vermeer 2004: 227-238) for translation, difficulty in establishing objectified quality assessment (e.g. Hatim and Mason 1989: 4-5), variance in translators' textual competence, receptors' comprehension and mutual knowledge (e.g. Bell 1991: 35-43; Neubert and Shreve 1992: 53-65; Hatim 1997: 1-12; Campbell 1998: 1-21) and so on. To deal with the topic, Catford (Ibid.: 94) distinguishes linguistic and cultural untranslatability: "In linguistic untranslatability the functionally relevant features include some which are in fact formal features of the language of the SL text. If the TL has no formally corresponding feature, the text, or the item, is (relatively) untranslatable." For cultural untranslatability (Ibid.: 99), "What appears to be a quite different problem arises, however, when a situational feature, functionally relevant for the SL text, is completely absent in the culture of which the TL is a part." After commenting that cultural untranslatability is usually less 'absolute' than linguistic untranslatability, he (Ibid.: 101) writes "In many cases, at least, what renders 'culturally untranslatable' item 'untranslatable' is the fact that the use in the TL text of any approximate translation equivalent produces an unusual collocation in the TL". Based on this argument, he (Ibid.) concludes "To talk of 'cultural untranslatability' may be just another way of talking about collocation untranslatability: the impossibility of finding an equivalent collocation in the TL", and "This would be a type of linguistic untranslatability".

This discussion poses the following question: What if there is an item which is linguistically translatable into the TL but culturally untranslatable into the TC? Or in Catford's words (Ibid.:

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Cultural untranslatability is an important, useful concept for translation between languages with a great cultural difference.

102), what if a situational feature gives a 'cultural shock' yet no 'collocational shock' in translation (e.g. the situational feature is incongruous or even disagreeing in the TC)? If so, as Catford discusses at first, cultural untranslatability may be distinguished, or at least, such an item possibly provides useful insights for translation concerning culture.

Bassnett (2002: 40) criticizes Catford as follows: "Catford starts from different premises, and because he does not go far enough in considering the dynamic nature of language and culture, he invalidates his own category of cultural

untranslatability." On the other hand, Catford (Ibid.: 103) leaves a message for the future: "If, indeed, it should turn out that 'cultural untranslatability' is ultimately describable in all cases as a variety of *linguistic* untranslatability, then the power of translation-theory will have been considerably increased [...]." The purpose of this paper is to propose cultural untranslatability, focusing on what it is, how important it is, and when it occurs.

For the term '(un)translatability', Hatim and Munday (2004: 15) describe it as "a relative notion", and it "has to do with the extent to which, despite obvious differences in linguistic structure (grammar, vocabulary, etc), meaning can still be adequately expressed across languages". They (Ibid.) add "But, for this to be possible, meaning has to be understood not only in terms of what the ST contains, but also and equally significantly, in terms of such factors as communicative purpose, target audience and purpose of translation". This paper primarily concerns the 'equally significant factors' in the latter part of their explanation and attempts to illustrate those factors.

Before discussing any further, we first want to know whether cultural differences in fact cause untranslatability. Considering actual translating, this paper provisionally treats culturally meaningless or incongruous items as 'culturally untranslatable.' The following serves as a sample; a set of Japanese and English proverbs that metaphorically describe personal characteristics, quoted from a study of American and Japanese business discourse (Yamada 1992), followed by her comments:

- *Deru kugi wa utareru* (Yamada 1992: 33)

(Lit.) *sticks out nail gets hammered*

- The nail that sticks out gets hammered back in (Ibid.).

For Americans, a strong individual is a better one, someone who can "stand on his/her own two feet"; someone who stands out as an individual. For Japanese, the proverb reflects how a group member should not stand out. In fact, translating the compliment in English, "She is a real individual!" to Japanese becomes an insult: "*Kosei no tsuyoi hito ne!*" (What a person with strong individuality!). This pejorative remark has the combined sense of: She is weird (different) and selfish (does what she wants without conforming).

Yamada (Ibid.)

In Japanese culture, the nail (i.e. an individualistic person) gets hammered (e.g. criticized) because it is a violator in the collective society. Yamada's work implies that, if the English proverb is used as a TT in the United States, it can be inappropriate in the TC (American culture) where 'the nail that sticks out' is usually 'a better one'. The TT is unlikely to be culturally congruous, while both are linguistically translatable to each other with no collocation oddness. The sample suggests the possible existence of 'untranslatability by reason of cultural difference' that I use as a primitive definition of the term 'cultural untranslatability' in this paper.

In actual translating, translators tend to manipulate (i.e. modify) or omit culturally incongruous items, so that they eventually become translatable and acceptable (for acceptability, see for instance Bell 1991: 167; Neubert and Shreve 1992: 69ff.). To focus on 'untranslatability by reason of cultural difference', a culturally untranslatable item in this paper means an untranslatable ST as it is before manipulation or omission takes place.

This paper first explores cultural concepts for understanding culture. The second part examines Hofstede's cultural dimensions and establishes an experimental definition of cultural difference. Drawing on English and Japanese proverbs, the third part discusses the importance of cultural untranslatability in translation. Finally, it considers under what circumstances such untranslatable items are de facto culturally untranslatable, borrowing the concept of translation norms. The paper thoroughly examines Hofstede's concepts because it can be interdisciplinary to translation studies, not everyone is familiar with the difference between disparate cultures, and the theoretical connection between his norms and translation norms is essential for the argument.

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Exploration of Cultural Concepts

To begin with, it is necessary to have a general understanding of culture, which is of interest to a number of scholars and researchers in academia. I will examine some of the key concepts in different disciplines. The purpose of this chapter is to have a sufficient understanding of culture for the discussion, rather than to establish a perfect definition that can be very complex and require substantial discussion.

A general view of culture may be Foley (1997: 108) in anthropological linguistics: "A culture is a mental system which generates all and only the proper cultural behavior." We may say that 'culture is a mental system' as an initial idea. In translation studies, Snell-Hornby (1988/1995) quotes Hymes to provide an important point: "Culture is here not understood in the narrower sense of man's advanced intellectual development as reflected in the arts, but in the broader anthropological sense to refer to all socially conditioned aspects of human life" (cf. Hymes 1964, quoted in Snell-Hornby 1988/1995: 39). In ethnopsychology, there is a parallel that I also agree with: "In most Western Languages, 'culture' commonly means 'civilization' or 'refinement of the mind' and in particular the results of such refinement, like education, art, and literature. This is 'culture in the narrow sense.'" (Hofstede 1991: 5) For the 'broader sense', Hofstede quotes the following well-known anthropological consensus definition:

Culture consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values.

(Kluchhohn 1951: 86, quoted in Hofstede 2000: 9)

In his extensive research and work, Hofstede (Ibid.) treats culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" which is, in his own words, "a shorthand definition; it implies everything in Kluchhohn's more extensive definition above" (Ibid.: 9-10). To construct my argument in this paper, I follow the idea of 'culture in the broad sense' by Kluchhohn and Hofstede.

To position my view in translation studies, I will look at several definitions; Newmark (1987: 94) defines culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression". He also writes "Culture: Objects, processes, institutions, customs, ideas peculiar to one group people" (Ibid. 282). This is practicable especially for actual translating, but contains the 'narrow sense,' contradicting the idea that culture is a mental system with specific values. Baker (1992: 21) uses 'airing cupboard' as an example of what she calls culture-specific concepts that is obviously the narrow sense, too. I am not even sure if her terminology is appropriate, because I prefer the term 'socio-cultural object' (Hatim and Mason 1996: 18) to refer to a single word or a combination of words to signify one object, including her example. Hatim and Mason's term seems suitable for the narrow sense.

Pym (1998: 177) uses the term 'interculture' to refer to "beliefs and practices found in intersections or overlaps of cultures, where people combine something of two or more cultures at once". In explaining the term, he (Ibid.) does not define culture, suggesting "To avoid hasty assumptions of monocultures I propose that 'culture' to be left undefined, as the area where we have most to discover." He (Ibid.) explains "More exactly, individual cultures can be defined by negotiation, not as the sources and targets of texts but as resistance to the movement of texts from one translation to another [...]". I agree with the part "individual cultures can be defined by negotiation" and the idea of the descriptive approach, but this is too abstract for my argument.

For this paper, I use the term culture in 'the broad sense' instead of the ideas in the narrow sense above. My point here is that culture in the broad sense should not be mixed up with the narrow sense, and I do not mean to undervalue the significance of the 'narrow sense', which is necessary especially for translating a socio-cultural object. For instance, Newmark provides useful approaches to translating cultural terms, although his work sees culture in the narrow sense (see Newmark 1981: 70-83; 1987: 94-103). In actual translating, a Japanese translation of Baker's example 'airing the cupboard' (Ibid.: 21) can be '*Hoon tansu*' (*my translation*) that is a descriptive translation in Newmark's terminology. Alternatively, transference (Newmark 1987: 81) can be another approach which renders '*earingu kabaado*' (cf. Takebayashi et al. 1996).

Additionally, I would like to note several unique characteristics of culture. First, culture is a general tendency different from individual personality. Culture is shared with others, whereas individual personality is not (see for instance Hofstede 2000: 2-3). Second, culture changes (e.g. Nida 2001: 18-9), although national cultures are extremely stable over time (Hofstede 2000: 34). The final point concerns the relationship between culture and language: Language

is a vehicle which reflects cultural specificity, rather than part of culture (cf. Hatim and Mason 1989: 237; Newmark 1987: 7). Culture and language are perhaps two independent but closely linked systems.

Definition of Cultural Difference

To establish a workable definition of cultural difference for the concept of cultural untranslatability, I will examine Hofstede's cultural dimensions and then provide 1) reasons why I adopt his work as my theoretical framework and 2) counterarguments against criticism of Hofstede. In brief, cultural dimensions are a set of theoretical concepts of culture, generated from paper-and-pencil survey results collected within subsidiaries of one large multi-national organization, IBM, in 72 countries (2000: xix). Hofstede establishes five cultural dimensions; power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and long-term orientation. For the sake of brevity, this paper only discusses individualism, which is defined as: "Individualism on the other side versus its opposite, collectivism, is the degree to which individuals are supposed to look after themselves or remain integrated into groups, usually around the family" (Ibid.: xx). The term has to do with "the relationship between the individual and the collectivity that prevails in a given society" (Ibid.: 209). In some cultures, individualism is seen as a blessing and a source of well-being; in others, it is seen as alienating (Ibid.). As a comprehensive definition, individualism stands for "a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: Everyone is expected to look after him/herself and her/his immediate family only" (Ibid.: 225). Collectivism stands for "a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (Ibid.). The table below exhibits 'Individualism Index Values (IDV) for 50 countries and three regions:

Rank	Country	IDV	Rank	Country	IDV
1	USA	91	28	Turkey	37
2	Australia	90	29	Uruguay	36
2	Great Britain	89	30	Greece	35
4/5	Canada	80	31	Philippines	32
4/5	Netherlands	80	32	Mexico	30
6	New Zealand	79	33/35	East Africa	27
7	Italy	76	33/35	Yugoslavia	27
8	Belgium	75	33/35	Portugal	27
9	Denmark	74	36	Malaysia	26
10/11	Sweden	71	37	Hong Kong	25
10/11	France	71	38	Chile	23
12	Ireland	70	39/41	West Africa	20

13	Norway	69	39/41	Singapore	20
14	Switzerland	68	39/41	Thailand	20
15	Germany F.R.	67	42	Salvador	19
15	South Africa	65	43	South Korea	18
17	Finland	63	44	Taiwan	17
18	Austria	55	45	Peru	16
19	Israel	54	46	Costa Rica	15
20	Spain	51	47/48	Pakistan	14
21	India	48	47/48	Indonesia	14
22/23	Japan	46	49	Colombia	13
22/23	Argentina	46	50	Venezuela	12
24	Iran	41	51	Panama	11
25	Jamaica	39	52	Equador	8
26/27	Brazil	38	53	Guatemala	6
26/27	Arab countries	38			

(1991: 53; 2000: 215)

The index values range from 91 for the United States (high individualism or low collectivism) to 6 for Guatemala (low individualism or high collectivism), with an overall mean of 43 and a standard deviation of 25 (2000: 215). This can be interpreted as: 1) the IDV for Japan is approximately the world average, and 2) the United States, Australia and Great Britain have a high degree of individualism.

Hofstede provides value comparisons, 'cultural values and attitudes', revealed through theoretical reasoning and statistical analysis. I partially quote his 'Summary of Values and Attitudes Differences Found Correlated with IDV', which explains characteristics of high and low IDV countries at the national level.

Low IDV	High IDV
Group decisions are better.	Individual decisions are better.

Interpersonal relations important for students' happiness.	Intrapersonal hedonism important for students' happiness.
Friendship predetermined by social network.	Importance of making specific friends.

(2000: 226)

Similarly, Hofstede establishes societal norms for each cultural dimension. Societal norms are "meant to be a value system shared by a majority in the middle classes in a society" (Ibid.: 97). A value system contains "both values as the desirable and values as the desired and is only at some difference followed by reality" (Ibid.). His societal norms—logical conjectures underpinned by survey results, evidence and analysis—are convincing overall, as they portray the dimensions, although some of them are results of induction. In his own words (Ibid.), "I complete the picture with elements based on intuition rather than on empirical evidence, much as an archaeologist completes ancient pottery from which shards missing".

Low IDV	High IDV
'We' consciousness.	'I' consciousness.
Emphasis on belonging: membership ideal.	Emphasis on individual initiative and achievement: leadership ideal.
Activities imposed by context.	Self-started activities.

(2000: 227)

I also partially quote some of the 'Key Differences in the Family and at School' established for each dimension. The differences generally correlate to a number of survey results conducted and analyzed by various researchers in the past few decades (cf. Ibid.: 98-102). The last pair of difference is usually applicable to the language combination of English and Japanese.

Low IDV	High IDV
Others classified as in-group or out-group.	Others classified as individuals.
Harmony should always be maintained and direct confrontation avoided.	Speaking one's mind is a characteristic of an honest person.
Languages in which the word I is not pronounced.	Languages in which the word I is indispensable for understanding.

(2000: 236-237)

Borrowing from Hofstede's work, I define cultural difference as the relative difference between index values for my discussion. For example, the difference with respect to individualism between the GB and Japan is 43, calculated as 89—46. The difference between the USA and Guatemala is 85 (= 91—6), which is the greatest with respect to cultural difference of individualism. I use this numerical approach because 1) it is easy to compare countries to each other, providing a clear idea of how great the difference is, and 2) it agrees with the idea that index values represent *relative*, not absolute positions of countries: they are measures of differences only (Hofstede 1991: 25). From this definition, I can say that that there is a specific cultural difference between the GB and Japan, but it is less than the difference between the world's extremes.

Note that the definition is simply an approach to have comparative ideas on cultural differences which are generally difficult to describe in a systematic manner. This approach does not give us any definite ideas on translating; for instance the definition does not justify the idea that translating between highly different languages is harder than it is between relatively similar ones. As mentioned in the previous chapter, culture and language are independent yet closely linked systems. The scope of Hofstede's work is culture, not language. His work endorses the cultural difference in the dimensions but nothing about translation activities. This paper borrows from his work for the definition to picture cultural differences—reflections in a language that may not perfectly correlate with his research outcomes.

Additionally, his cultural dimensions suggest another unique feature about culture. Because cultural difference is subject to the culture combination, cultural untranslatability is presumably dependent upon the language combination of the translation. This means that cultural untranslatability is not equally applicable to all language combinations, audience, translators, or even translation scholars. For instance, Canada and the Netherlands have the same IDV value of 80, indicating that there is no or only a nominal cultural difference of individualism between the countries. Therefore, cultural untranslatability is probably meaningless to Dutch-English translators, who are only familiar with these two cultures.

The central reason why I adopt Hofstede's cultural dimensions as my theoretical base is that his work is widely used and generally accepted in academia. For instance, in social science, Lawler and Bae (1998: 126) declare "We employ widely used measures of national culture developed by Hofstede". A number of textbooks in international management (e.g. Lane et al. 2000: 82-101; Tayeb 2003: 43-86) substantially quote Hofstede to cope with cross-cultural issues. In her study of linguistic politeness, Fukushima (2000: 101-126) discusses whether British and Japanese cultures are collectivist or individualist, and her conclusion hinges on Hofstede. Although not subsumed under linguistics, his work seems applicable to language activities pertinent to cultural studies.

To reinforce the theoretical base, I will examine criticisms of Hofstede. The following is excerpted from Gooderham and Nordhaug (2003: 139-140):

- The research methodology is entirely based on an attitude-survey questionnaire, which Tayeb (1996) contends is the least appropriate way of studying culture. However, for comparative purposes it is very efficient.
- The sample is not representative because it is drawn from a single company comprising middle-class employees.
- Four dimensions are simply inadequate to convey cultural differences.
- The research is dated.

For the first criticism, Hofstede's work suits this paper which aims to compare cultures. There might be more appropriate approaches to studying or concentrating on a single culture, but Hofstede seems best for comparison purposes. For the second one, Hofstede provides his answer in his work (Hofstede 1991: 4): Much of it (patterns of thinking, feeling, and potential acting) has been acquired in early childhood (see for details Gooderham and Nordhaug 2003: 140). The third one seems rather pointless because probably no other academic research in relation to culture is more detailed or accepted in academia. This implies that Hofstede's work is the best possible option among concepts available for comparison purposes. The last one is relevant to my discussion. For example, McCoy et al. (2005: 211) write "While Hofstede's cultural dimensions—uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity/femininity, and individualism/collectivism—are still widely used in many disciplines, it is not guaranteed that the measures still hold after over 30 years". As mentioned previously, I agree that culture changes over time, and change causes shifts in Hofstede's index values. This nonetheless does not crucially affect my approach because cultural difference in this paper is defined as relative difference between index values. For instance, if the current, real value of individualism for the Great Britain is 86, instead of 89, the cultural difference between the Great Britain and Japan can be 40 (= 86—46). The current difference may be smaller, but this does not refute the fact that there is a cultural difference. Mead (1998: 43) sums up the strengths and weaknesses of Hofstede's: "No other study compares so much other national cultures in so much detail. Simply, this is the best there is."

Importance of Cultural Untranslatability

Having outlined the definition of cultural difference for this paper, I would like to discuss why the concept of cultural untranslatability is important for translating. The central reason corresponds to Nida (1964:12): "The best translation does not sound like a translation"—'naturalness' is a key requirement for Nida (Munday 2001: 42). Indeed, an everyday translation setting often demands a quality translation that exhibits 'naturalness', although the definition of 'quality' varies according to the translation setting or purpose (e.g. Nord 1997). The concept of cultural untranslatability is important when the cultural difference is great because, without dealing with it, translators cannot attain 'naturalness' or even convey the ST's intention.

To illustrate the importance of this concept, I look at Yamada's work once again: "She is a real individual" (Yamada 1992: 33). This is generally used to describe or compliment someone with a favorable personal trait in the United States or presumably in many regions with an individualistic culture. The quoted TT—"Kosei no tsuyoi hito ne" Yamada (Ibid.)—is linguistically flawless but in reality problematic in the TC (i.e. Japanese culture). As Yamada (Ibid.) explains, the TT is usually used as an insult for an unwelcome person in the TC where the social norms disapprove an individualistic personal trait. Not only the TT, but also any text referring favorably to an individualistic person is in fact unlikely to function in the TC, since this person would violate the social norms. If the TT is used as it is to compliment someone—in other words, the translator has missed recognizing and working on the cultural untranslatability in the text like Yamada's translation—it does not sound natural at all in the TC. The problem in this case is that the TT, a linguistically fine translation with no collocation oddness, does not convey the ST intention to compliment her, due to the research-proven cultural difference that changes the definition of a favorable personal trait and consequently the way or sense of complimenting. This sample suggests that, in translation process, detecting and working on cultural untranslatability in the ST is important for the TT to sound 'natural', when the purpose of translating demands naturalness.

Dealing with cultural untranslatability probably has to do with omitting or manipulating (i.e. altering or rewriting) the ST; e.g. rewriting in Lefevere (1992: 9) or Bassnett and Lefevere (1990: 10). Looking at the sample again, we may translate the ST, rewriting for instance 'She is a considerate person,' which is naturally used to compliment someone in the TC. You have now manipulated the ST but probably attained naturalness or perhaps dynamic equivalence (Nida 1964: 159; Nida and Tabor 1969: 22), depending upon the context.

There is abundant literature sources concerning some kind of cultural untranslatability, although they do not specifically use the term. For example, *Misunderstanding in Social Life* (House et al.: 2003) contains pertinent articles, one of which (Turner and Hiraga 2003: 155) relates to power distance, another Hofstede's cultural dimension. Buchanan (1965) works on cross-cultural proverbs between Japan and the United States, providing insights into the cultural difference. Below is a set of Japanese and English proverbs that also pertains to Individualism, quoted from Buchanan (1965: 64). The English one is a translation of the source in Japanese:

- *Magaraneba yo ga watararenu* (Buchanan 1965: 64; Nishimoto 1962: 195).
- Unless you are crooked you cannot get along in the world (Buchanan: Ibid.).

On the proverb, Buchanan (Ibid.) comments "What a commentary this is on the dishonesty and deceit in the world!" His comment appears to be made from the viewpoint of the TC (i.e. American culture). To understand the proverb from the SC viewpoint, I return to Hofstede's individual societal norms and key differences: "Group decisions are better" versus "Individual decisions are better"; "Activities imposed by context" versus "Self-started activities"; "Harmony should always be maintained and direct confrontation avoided" versus "Speaking one's mind is a characteristic of an honest person". One interpretation of the proverb can be: 'Unless you are crooked you cannot get along in the world because you need to smother your opinion to maintain in-group harmony.' I assume that this prioritizing harmony over expressing self appeared as 'dishonesty' for Buchanan. The original proverb primarily denotes the way of life in Japan, rather than dishonest concealment of real feelings. An English paraphrase of the ST can be: 'Concealment of real feelings to maintain in-group harmony is a good or acceptable practice' in the SC. This is usually natural in the SC but not in the TC with a high IDV value. When an ST contains the notion of the English paraphrase to construct a key part of the context, the ST may be culturally untranslatable, possibly according to the degree to which the paraphrase is incongruous to the TC; in other words, how great the cultural difference is. With respect to individualism, there is a cultural difference of 45 between the USA and Japan that makes a 'natural' item unnatural.

To illustrate the importance of cultural untranslatability, I have drawn on linguistic items that comprise multiple words to represent certain cultural specificity (i.e. culture in the broad sense). There are two reasons for this: 1) connections between cultural specificity and Hofstede's societal norms are helpful in discussing the importance, and 2) translating a socio-cultural object (i.e. culture in the narrow sense) often leads to discussion of semantic fields (e.g. Baker 1992: 18-20) or a search for a cultural, functional or descriptive equivalent (Newmark 1987: 82-4). Translating a socio-cultural object does not involve or consider the cultural difference discussed in this chapter. Once again, culture in the broad sense should not be mixed up with the narrow sense. This is why I said 'cultural specificity', rather than 'situational feature' (Catford 1965: 99) which seems to include both broad and narrow sense.

Conditions of Occurrence of Cultural Untranslatability

In this chapter, I would like to discuss under what circumstances an ST is in fact untranslatable, or what determines the occurrence of cultural (un)translatability in the TC. This discussion is important because, for instance, a culturally incongruous translation may be used as an appropriate one in a translation setting where the target audience accepts it.

Using a descriptive approach, I will attempt to clarify the ambiguity in the idea that "ST texts are *more or less* untranslatable" (Catford 1965: 93). For this purpose, I presuppose that there are some conditions of occurrence of cultural untranslatability, and there is a deciding factor for such conditions. To give shape to a deciding factor, I borrow the concept of translation norms (e.g. Chesterman 1997; Hermans 1999; Toury 1995) that is helpful in contextualizing conditions of occurrence and putting my discussion together as well.

A starting point may be the idea that translation can be seen as a norm-governed activity. For instance, Toury (1995: 53-69) distinguishes three types of norms; initial norms, preliminary norms and operational norms as those applicable to translation. Chesterman (1997: 51-85) first discusses social, ethical and technical norms and then subdivides technical norms into process (or production) norms and product (or expectancy) norms. Both Toury's and Chesterman's norms are sub-categorized differently.

There is an issue about the concept of translation norms: "While the literature on the subject is substantial, there is no unanimity on terminology or on the exact distinctions as regards the cluster of concepts that includes norms, conventions, rules, constraints, and so on" (Hermans 1999: 80). Likewise, Snell-Hornby (2006: 78) comments on Schäffner (1999), which contains open debates on the topic, 'Translation and Norms': "What possibly strikes the reader most [...] is again that this is an issue not of content, fact or even perspective, but one of the varying use of concepts". Furthermore, Hatim (2001: 70) writes "The literature on the subject was extremely confused, and many contradictory normative models were in circulation".

Nevertheless, I agree with the basic idea that language activities, including translating, can be seen as norm-governed. Criticisms in the literature are due to the disagreement concerning the terminologies and the differing models established individually, not the basic idea of the concept. A substantial amount (Hermans *Ibid.*: 80) of literature endorses the concept (e.g. Hjort 1992; Lewis 1969), and ignoring this can be rather unjustifiable. To understand the concept of norms, I should look at plain and precise descriptions. Bartsch (1987: 76) defines norms as the social reality of correctness notions (quoted in Chesterman *Ibid.*: 54). Hermans (*Ibid.*: 84) provides three aspects of norms; 1) the 'norm' as a recurring (i.e. general) pattern in behavior, 2) the directive force (i.e. pressure exerted on individuals' behavior) and 3) the content of a norm (i.e. a value, a notion of what is correct). These not only explain the concept of norms but also correlate closely with Hofstede's societal norms which are observable patterns in behavior. In essence, norms are those patterns or lead individuals to such patterns in conformity with specific notions of what comprises correct behavior. A comprehensive description for translating can be: "The notion of what constitutes 'correct' behavior, or 'correct' linguistic usage, or 'correct' translation, is a social, cultural and ideological construct", and "Compliance with the set of translation norms regarded as pertinent in a given community or domain means that the product, i.e. the translation, is likely to conform to the relevant correctness notion" (Hermans *Ibid.*: 84-5). Consequently, "[...] what one section or community or historical period calls correct may be quite different from what others, or some of us today, may call correct", and hence "Correctness in translation is relative—linguistically, socially, politically, ideologically" Hermans (*Ibid.*). One of the implications here can be that the notion of 'correctness' is peculiar to a certain translation setting—where the translator or the audience is. I adopt the notion of correctness as the deciding factor for the framework of conditions of occurrence.

The deciding factor seems applicable to the literature: Hatim and Mason (1989: 12) write "The translator's motivations are inextricably bound up with the socio-cultural context in which the act of translating takes place," and "Consequently, it is important to judge translating activity only within a social context." I would argue that it is important also because the notion of correctness is peculiar to a social context and correct only in the translation setting. In the previous chapter, I quoted two key words, 'naturalness' and 'rewriting.' Why does Nida (1964: 12) claim "The best translation does not sound like a translation"? With respect to cultural translatability, it is supposedly because 'the best translation' has the notion of correctness peculiar to the translation setting, conveying the sense of 'naturalness' in the TC. Why does Lefevere (1992: 9) stress the effectiveness of rewriting? It is similarly because 'rewriting' alters the correctness in the ST, so that the TT has the notion of correctness peculiar to the TC translation setting.

Combining the ideas on translation norms and Hofstede's societal norms, I presume that a to-be state of a culturally congruous translation can vary according to the notion of correctness of the translation setting with specific translation norms in a socio-cultural context with specific societal norms. The contents of societal norms vary significantly according to the cultural difference as defined in this paper with the research-proven facts. Cultural untranslatability tends to occur when TT is culturally incongruous with the notion of correctness in the TC where the translation setting demands cultural conformity. When such conditions are met, for instance, the samples in this paper are de facto culturally incorrect and untranslatable. I conclude that cultural untranslatability is a possible concept, and the notion of correctness peculiar to a specific culture in the 'broad sense' constructs a required figure of TT and determines cultural untranslatability in the TC. If untranslatability by reason

of cultural difference in this paper is seen as cultural untranslatability, it may be distinguished from linguistic translatability.

Concluding Remarks

To illustrate cultural untranslatability, this paper has examined culturally incongruous items to the TC. The examples are unlikely to function as they are in the TC, although they are linguistically fine items with no collocation oddness in the TL. Without detecting and dealing with cultural untranslatability, translators may fail to convey the naturalness or even the ST's true intention.

Because cultural untranslatability is not applicable to all language combinations, the concept may be insignificant to translators or translation scholars who work in a language combination that involves no or only a marginal cultural difference. Depending on the local notion of correctness peculiar to the socio-cultural context, however, some translations can indeed be incompatible with the TC. Translating such culturally untranslatable items entails sufficient knowledge about the culture, demanding sensible approaches by translators.

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