
Interlingual representations, the MT triangle and good food

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The fact that two different translators can appropriately translate the Spanish expressions "[d]el tercer piso" and "el segundo piso" in:

... los 300 metros cuadrados del tercer piso estaban disponibles pero fueron aquilados ..., sslo queda el segundo piso

as, on the one hand, "the third floor" and "the second floor" respectively and, on the other, "the fourth floor" and "the third floor" respectively, demonstrates (1) that the representation of the semantics of the expressions uttered is insufficient for providing an appropriate translation and (2) that the representation of the translator's beliefs about the beliefs of the participants in the translation process (the SL speaker/author, the SL addressee and the TL addressee) which are needed for assigning an interpretation to the utterance are, in fact, necessary. That the seemingly contradictory translations provided above are both potentially appropriate is due to the fact that there are at least two floor naming conventions that are

used around the world. Under the first, the ground level of a multi-story building is referred to as the ground or bottom floor while, under the second, it is referred to as the first floor. One of the translators above assumes that the source language author and addressee and target language addressee all follow the same convention. The second translator assumes that, while the source language author and addressee are following the first convention, the target language addressee is following the second convention.

The process of translation, then, consists of interpreting a speech act - someone's intentionally using some expression with a given semantics to communicate some message to someone else for some purpose - and then recreating that act to the degree possible using a different language and addressing a different audience - that is, the translator, adopting the relevant beliefs of author of the original act, intentionally uses a different expression with possibly a different semantics to communicate the same message to a different addressee for presumably the same purpose.

In the case above, if the semantics of the original expression used to convey the message is taken to be the (compositional) semantic representation of that expression, then the interpretation of the message is arrived at by inferencing from that representation in order to provide coherence within the context: the beliefs of the SL speaker and addressees, the speaker goals conveying that message at that point in the discourse. That is, while the semantics of say "el tercer piso" is some logical statement about a particular third story [of some building] as might be derived in combining the semantics of "el", "tercer" and "piso" appropriately, it remains to provide some convention for the ordering the stories of the particular building in order to provide the expression with a coherent interpretation, that is, to identify which floor of the building is being referred to. That convention is provided by the discourse context of the SL utterance for interpretation and for the discourse context of the TL utterance for producing a target language expression.

This model implies that expressions in different languages having the same (or to the degree possible similar) semantic representations may not be translations of each other if the contexts, the beliefs of the participants in the two interactions, that determine the interpretation are different. This in turn implies that (1) ILs must represent something more than the semantics of the SL expression (or TL) expression, that (2) it should include a representation of the relevant beliefs of the various participants needed for producing an appropriate translation and that (3) beliefs-based inferencing on the

basis of knowledge of the world may operate on ILs after semantic analysis and before generation in order to maintain the coherence of the event reported with respect to the events that have preceded it within a shifting beliefs context from SL to TL utterances.

Finally, the traditional MT triangle, long known to be flawed in its representation of direct MT approaches, also appears to be flawed in terms of its representation of IL approaches. There need not be a single IL representation which is the result of SL analysis which serves as the input to TL generation. Rather, when SL context is swapped out for TL context, beliefs relevant to the interpretation process may be replaced by differing beliefs in the TL context triggering a revision of the IL. At best, the triangle now looks like the bottom of a cup.

In fact, this situation is more like following a cake recipe calling for flour, eggs, butter, water, sugar, etc. all baked at a certain temperature for a given amount of time. It produces excellent results in Moscow, Idaho and perhaps in Moscow, Russia but, because the wheat, the chickens, the cows, the water, the sugar, the altitude and the oven are all different, the cakes are not the same. And, in fact, to achieve as similar a cake as possible, proportions may have to be changed and baking methods varied.
