

# TRANSLATION PRACTICES AT CROSSROADS: BLOGGING WITH G.I.L.T.

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## **Abstract**

*Modern translation studies need to expand their limits in order to cover the new cyber-means of individual expression (websites, weblogs), in which translation plays an important part. Diary-type or topic-focused blogs reveal the bloggers' preference for first-hand translation, yet only few such sources of information take into account the importance of a good translation and even fewer use the services of trained translators.*

*Far from being only a passing trend, web writing is now a platform for self expression, for the benefit of infinite numbers of readers. It is easy to note, in this context, that many of the contributors to such a significant database are following, albeit involuntarily, all modern GILT practices: globalization, internationalization, localization and translation.*

*The present paper deals with the specific ways in which the language transfer takes place in such areas of information, as well as with the difficulties arising from the display of specific non-linear texts which combine translated and source-language information.*

**Key words:** Globalization, Internationalization, Translation, communication, quality translation

GILT is a modern theoretical concept which in fact refers to a sequence of practical procedures specific for the contemporary development of languages. Under the continuing influence of English, various terminological corpora extend their content. The tendency of globalization, internationalization and localization of terms (eventually called “translation”) increases already existing difficulties in translating such terms, and a specific example which confirms this assertion is that of the electronic content of websites, blogs and forums. In theory, these vocabulary enhancement stages should take place under a reasonably strict control; in practice, however, the specific features of web communication (unlimited freedom of expression) are bound to hinder academic efforts. Also, a certain delay in approaching this

topic from a theoretical point of view [as noted among others by Minako O'Hagan, MuTra, 2005] in the field of Translation Studies, while the development of high tech means is booming, makes it even more difficult to cope with this problem in a satisfactory way.

As a specific term, GILT is also used for the purpose of adapting software to local language requirements, thus “reflecting the complexity involved in making a product or content global-ready” [O'Hagan, 2005: 5]. The most important difference, the author explains, between adapting software to local requirements and text translation lies in the use of “text strings” which are deconstructed, then “recompiled”, thus “combining language translation with software engineering”. The sequence of stages also differs from language diversification. At language level the common rule requires first an internationalization of terms (a term makes its way into other languages and can be recognized by speakers of other language), then the term becomes global and is finally localized by simply adapting it to local grammar rules (*e.g.* “*a realiza*”). In software translation, internationalization is understood as a “pre-localization” at technical level, accompanied by a language transfer and supporting media, as well as non-linear adjustments.

Websites and blogs are an important part of everybody's life today. In the last few years the number of blogs and bloggers has increased by thousands. In certain environments, not having a blog is unthinkable. The content of such electronic “diaries” varies largely, from accounts of everyday facts to academic and scientific information, and the number of relevant sources used by bloggers is thus unlimited.

From the point of view of the individual perception of information rendered in foreign languages (and especially English), localization is the easiest way of making the shift into Romanian, but most bloggers are unaware or indifferent to the effects of these “draft translations” on constant or accidental readers and on their perception of English. In fact they act as vehicles of a cross-cultural data transfer. If the individually assumed language shift is achieved within acceptable limits, the intercultural communication has a positive effect on learning and comparing languages; if the rendering of terms in the target language is incorrect (what was earlier described as “draft translation”), the effect is negative on both levels.

As a rule, blog translations have an interlingual component, as well as an intralingual one, determined largely by the individual mind processes of each blogger. If terms have a larger range of meanings, semiotic and semantic specificity also comes into play. Also, blogging excludes traditional academic writing rules and, more often than not, colloquial or elliptical speech tends to take the place of standard language in writing, in which case the subjectivity of each blog owner also becomes an important variable in determining the way

in which the translated text is understood by readers. Non-linear (“hypertext”) accumulative information is also common for all types of blogs, and it sometimes proves confusing due to the fact that, in part, such data are offered in the source language while the rest is translated. Thus, the single dimension characterizing traditional translation (either written/written or spoken/spoken) is now replaced, thanks to the complexity of web means, by a multi-dimensional, multi-directional type of communication. According to Gerzymisch-Arbogast [2005], “*electronic textuality and multimodal translation scenarios are today intrinsically interrelated with such translation subfields as LSP communication and audiovisual translation.*”

But practical examples are always the most interesting part of any research. Out of a wide range of websites, forums or blogs which attract the interest of Romanian users (about cooking, health and beauty, medical matters, unsolved mysteries, socializing, and so on) three different sites were chosen as a basis for this research; each of them has its specific characteristics and users. All use translation as an intercultural mediator, and the degree of correctness of the translated texts is variable.

The three sites under focus are the following:

- *The Leonard Cohen fan club forum* (the linking element, besides the topic, is English – for people whose mother tongues are very different). Different attitude towards Google translations. Translation and language shifts are fundamental in communication
- *Rețeaua literară* (a forum for Romanians all over the world – same target language/mother tongue, different attitudes towards translation)
- *Faleze de piatră* (literary online publication; *ibid* – but higher responsibility)

Of course there are dozens of other forums or blogs in which Romanians join for chat or information (e.g. cooking blogs) but I chose these 3 examples because of their assumed higher standards and level of language used.

***Three hypotheses are proposed for the discussion:***

***Hypothesis no. 1:*** The importance of correct translations in topic-focused websites, forums and blogs is directly proportional to the number of users having as a common ground the use of a common language (e.g. English);

***Hypothesis no. 2:*** The importance of correct translations is higher if the users of a website, forum or blog have a common higher education background;

***Hypothesis no. 3:*** Literary websites, forums or blogs are interested in proposing high quality translations for their presumed readers/users.

The first example proposed for this discussion is the Leonard Cohen fan-forum, which gathers music fans from all over the world. In order to assist communication, the common language of all concerned is English – quite naturally, since nowadays English is practically the second language in almost all countries around the world. As in any other case of a forum, the discussion focuses on topics of common interest, and among them are newspaper articles about concerts which take place in different countries.

The problem is that these articles are mostly written in local languages, and therefore a translation is needed, for everyone on the forum to have access to what is being written. If the language is a more widely known, such as French or Spanish, Italian or even German, things are easier. But what does one do when newspapers are written in Hindu, Greek or Russian, Japanese or Arabic?

The first choice – or rather the one at hand for all internet users – is the automatic translator offered by Google. A tragic choice, I should say, because, apart from a (limited) number of good translations of specialized terms, if only these are regarded separately and not in a context – the automatic translator is exactly what its name says: automatic, bearing no logic, and, therefore, incoherent. The following are two excerpts from texts initially written in Serbian and Spanish respectively, where a number of mistakes are underlined, in order to show the categories to which they belong.

**Text 1** (Google translation from Serbian):

*Leonard Norman Cohen was born in the 1934th in Vestmauntu, a town near Montreal, the Jewish family, his father was originally from Poland, mother from Lithuania. [...] After the book "The Spice-Box of Earth" by 1961, became well known in Canadian literary circles, [...] many musicians stand out at his model, his poems are dealt with more than 2,000 times!*

*Although the late nineties announced they will no longer touring, the decision was changed after it is 2005 his former manager emptied his retirement fund. A court in Los Angeles Cohen ruled in favor of Lynch and ordered to pay him nine million dollars, but even today has not got the money and had no choice but to go back to the scene. [...] Singer who was in the 72nd year remained nearly penniless (dollars) after it was stolen by a manager. Cohen will soon fill the 75th years.*

The *absence of the pronoun* is among the first mistakes to be noticed (“the late nineties announced”, instead of “*in the late nineties he announced*”). Similar to Romanian, Serbian renders gender and person denominants by verbal inflections, whereas English requires the presence of a noun, pronoun or similar element to stand for each instance in which the subject is required. Other mistakes point out the differences between phrase

structure in the two compared languages: “after *it is* 2005” instead of “*after* 2005”; “will no longer *touring*” instead of “*will no longer be touring*” and so on. Also, the expression “ordered *to pay him*” is totally unclear, failing to explain who is paying what to whom. References to years and a person’s age are also incorrect in the Google-managed translation. The expression “*in the 1934<sup>th</sup>*” probably refers (in original) to the 1934<sup>th</sup> year of the current era (*Annum Domini*) but this is not valid in the spirit of the English language. Other examples from the text include references to age: “was *in the 72nd* year”; “will soon *fill the 75th years*” – where the verb used (“to fill”) is also wrongly chosen., as is the preference for the plural form after the numeral.

### **Text 2 (Google translation from Spanish):**

*Paused* but equally vigorous 35 years ago, when *she* first performed in Spain, Cohen played great songs that have influenced many other artists. [...] More sober friend, the air heavy, the slight gestures of the great landscapes, the 'gentleman' started reciting 'a capella' 'Anthem', with an eerie silence in the Sant Jordi. When he began to sing, the band followed, and Cohen presented "to the city of Barcelona" to all his musicians, his hat in the chest in a gesture of homage [...]

In this second case, the interference of Spanish structures into the translated variant are also relevant, but the effect is even more dramatic due to the fact that, in this case, a more metaphorical type of text is at hand. A few explanations are necessary. In Spanish, the term “*pausado*” does not mean “paused” but “*slowly, unhurriedly*”; the original “*amigo de la sobriedad*” (which actually refers to a composed attitude, to *sobriety*) is rendered here by “sober” thus ridiculously alluding to a potential recovery from drunkenness (mistaking it for “soberness”); in the original text, “*the slight gestures of the great landscapes*” actually refer to the singer’s preference for a sombre atmosphere, rather than for the bravado; the “*eerie silence*” (which actually means “creepy”) has nothing in common with the writer’s intention when using “*sobrecogedor*” meant as “*impressive, overpowering*”.

All the above examples, to which so many more may be added, prove the fact that, similarly to the case of people in their first stages of learning English, Google translation does not take into account structural differences between languages. In the case of people learning a new language, their mother tongue takes precedence and highly influences the way in which they adapt words to the target language variant, nevertheless *using their logic* for that purpose. In the case of Google translator, however, the context logic is what is absent, while the program automatically makes the shifts within the limits of its program description. At the same time, texts in different languages are submitted to a *first-level localization* which

does not take into account the specific morphological and syntactic norms of the target language.

However, *Hypothesis no.1*, according to which the importance of correct translations in topic-focused websites, forums and blogs is directly proportional to the number of users having as a common ground the use of a common language, *cannot be confirmed*, due to the fact that a large majority of the users of the respective site are highly educated. In fact, the presence of such examples of incorrect translations is usually motivated by a general interest in knowing “what was said, *immediately* after any concert” – and, while being laughed at by everyone, they are soon followed by human translations at a higher level of correctness. Still, the general view is that, as long as everybody is able to understand the essential information being given, mistakes are acceptable for a short while, before being duly corrected. In this case, *correctness* is the variable which is *inversely proportional* to the people’s need for immediate information, but is *directly proportional* to their expectations regarding an adequate rendering of the facts.

The second and third cases proposed as examples for this discussion (*Rețeaua literară* and *Faleză de piatră*) are sites and forums with a higher standard of language requirements, and therefore Google translations are not present in their pages. Usually, translations from original texts (in various languages) are proposed by forum members, in an effort to make known to Romanian readers various pages of international literature.

The variety of these proposed works (and translations) is much greater than any publishing house would ever be able to offer. Reasons are several, and reduced costs can be an important motivation for this alternative choice. At the same time, more people are given the opportunity to put their mind at work, voluntarily, in the benefit of others – thus, the social benefit becomes significant. Following discussions attached to all proposed texts also bring the benefit of sharing opinion, comparing ideas or even suggesting ideas for future improvements of said works. Traditional books cannot offer, in themselves, such chances for sharing ideas or socialization, unless, of course, we think of the traditional – yet, unfortunately, ever more scarce literary circles. Many would say that face-to-face discussions are more precious; indeed it is so, but in the fast-moving world today, we can sometimes consider ourselves lucky to find “kindred spirits” in the cyber-world.

Users are often authors of literary pieces as well, according to their individual skills and feelings. Many of these authors are putting their talent to work for the first time, and view these forums as a platform for becoming known – an important proof of the fact that the internet is now a wide spread platform, with a larger potential for multiple access than the

traditional, paper publications. Moreover, getting one's literary essays published usually involves a great deal of stress related to financial means available. Internet proposals are just that – proposals – and other readers may judge them and approve of them or not, while their author has a chance to preserve these pieces of imagination for a later review.

Such a community site has a better chance of being promoted or accessed by interested bystanders than any blog. Apart from a small number of celebrated writers who use blogs for posting their latest works or for keeping in touch with their readers, literary blogs belonging to young, yet unconfirmed authors are scarce and hard to find. Such authors usually write for their own pleasure or for their friends, and therefore their social role is limited.

However, a significant difference between the two sites given as examples must be signalled: while *Faleze de piatră* is clearly a literary review, where the literary language requirements are observed by all authors, *Rețeaua literară* is a forum open to all Romanians living in the country or abroad – and not all of these are highly educated, but rather just literature lovers. In the former, a group of specialized editors are reviewing all prose and poetry proposed for publication, including all translations. Thus, users have a chance to benefit from appropriate, correct, well structured texts in which the meaning is not distorted or invalidated by the lack of logic or a poor knowledge of languages. The latter also has specific language correctness requirements which must be observed by potential writers.

A topic which still remains to become the focus of future researches is the way in which *localized terms* adopted from English are used in mother-tongue texts. In the last few years, the tendency *to adopt* (and *not to adapt*) English terms from various domains (including literature and humanistic sciences) is obvious in many sites, forums and blogs whose users are conversant in English. Linguistic tradition has it that the constant use of a new term ends by determining its inclusion into the language corpus, albeit at its spoken level. Still, the excessive use of localization, often by non-linguists, confronts the literati with the danger of losing control of academic and standard language levels. No linguistic control is possible in the area of forums, blogs or sites, unless their administrators take matters in their own hands.

*Hypothesis no. 2*, stating that the importance of correct translations is higher if the users of a website, forum or blog have a common higher education background - can be *only partially proved*, in the case of *România literară* forum, on two accounts. On the one hand, not all the users are, in this case, higher education graduates, but this does not prevent them from preferring quality translations. On the other hand, the same hypothesis seems to be valid

for *Faleză de piatră*. For both literary blogs /reviews, however, **Hypothesis no. 3 is valid on all accounts**, taking into account the administrators' constant interest in improving the quality of the works of literature and translations included in their pages.

As a conclusion, it can be said that, at a first look, internet resources such as blogs, forums or websites open the way to language localization, but this does not always equal good translation. Moreover, if the users of such an internet source come from different cultural areas, they tend to be focused on the topic at hand, rather than on the use of correct terminology. English acts as a common ground for all users and various users have various levels of knowledge of this language. However, if the users' mother tongue is the same, terminology localization tends to have deeper negative effects in the way in which translations from a source language (English) are perceived.

Finally, further research is needed in this complex area, in order to determine more specific variables which influence the appropriate reception of source language terms rendered in blog / forum translations.

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