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# MEANING IN THE VORTEX OF INTERVENTION AND TRANSLATION WITH A FOCUS ON INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY*

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## ABSTRACT

Translation is a socially regulated act of communication. Therefore, it is a matter of making implicit meanings explicit across languages and socio-cultural systems. The relative interests and positions of the participants play a crucial part in contextualizing the production and reception of translation. How can the stakeholders involved in or benefitting from this process ever be sure of the content of the information they are exposed to? Are translators/interpreters subservient or impartial agents? There is reaserach that demonstrate acts of intervention in translation/interpreting in action. Are all acts of intervention innocent or are they ever used to manipulate meaning? Can they be justified? Apart from usual linguistic interventions made to provide an idiomatic translation through 'shifts', there are instances where translators intervene in a more conscious, conspicuous and purposeful way. Change is the focus of intervention in translation. Intervention as a translation phenomenon has many ways. It is also regarded as the re-contextualization of meaning. Those benefitting from translation are open to vulnerability, which is a kind of symbolic violence. How should the freedom of stakeholders be treated in translation? Ethics as a system of principles governing individual action plays an important role in decision-making in translation process. This paper deals with the concept of "justified intervention" and the factors influencing meaning through intervention with a focus on international diplomacy.

**Key Words**: Translation, Intervention, Identity, Power Relations, Ethics

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# ULUSLARARASI DİPLOMASİDE ÇEVİRİ VE MÜDAHALE ANAFORUNDA ANLAM


## ÖZET

Çeviri, toplumsal bir iletişim eylemidir. İki farklı dil ve sosyo-kültür arasında anlam kapalıyken çeviri ile açık hale gelmektedir. Bu iletişim sürecinde çevirinin üretilmesi ve alımlanması yeni bir bağlamın oluşmasına neden olur ve bu yeni bağlamı bu sürece katılan tarafların konumları ve çıkarları etkiler. Bu durum yazılı ve sözlü çeviri için de böyledir. Çeviri sürecine katılan veya yararlanan çeviri paydaşları, kendilerine sunulan bilginin içeriğinden ve kalitesinden nasıl emin olabilirler? Çevirmenler, çeviri sürecine tarafsız ve sadık bir şekilde mi katılmaktadırlar? Çeviri uygulamaları incelenecek olursa, 'kaydırma' şeklinde gerekçelendirebileceğimiz müdahalelerinrin ötesinde çevirilerde bilinçli ve amaçlı müdahale örneklerinin de betimlendiği araştırmalar bulunmaktadır. Bu müdaheleler, etkisiz müdaheler midir yoksa bağlamın yeniden oluşturulduğu bu süreçte anlamı yönlendirmek için kullanılabilmektedirler mi? Çeviride müdahalenin odağında ise değişiklik vardır. Çeviride yapılan bu değişimler, gerekçelendirilen çeviri eylemleri midir? Bir çeviri olgusu olarak müdahalenin birçok yöntemi bulunmaktadır. Müdahale, anlamın yeni bir bağlam içinde ele alınması olarak da ele alınmaktadır. Çeviri paydaşları çevirinin bu yönüyle bir tür sembolik şiddete açık hale gelmektedir. Çeviri sürecinden yararlanan bu paydaşların özgürlüğünü nasıl ele alınabilir? Etik, bireyin davranışını yöneten ilkeler bütünü olarak çeviri sürecinde karar verme konusunda büyük bir rol oynar. Bu araştırmada uluslararası diplomasi örneğinde çeviri sürecinde müdahale kavramı, anlama etki eden nedenler ve "gerekçelendirilebilen müdahale" kavramı ele alınmaktadır.


**Anahtar Kelimeler**: Çeviri, Müdahale, Kimlik, Güç İlişkileri, Etik

## Introduction

Translation is a communicative act. In a situation where inter-lingual communication plays a role, translation is an activity employed by parties within different contexts across socio-cultural systems. How can those involved in or benefitting from this process ever be sure of the content of the information they are exposed to? Could the process of translating ever be used as a means of manipulation? Are translators subservient agents? Translation is intervention. Apart from usual linguistic interventions made to provide an idiomatic translation through 'shifts', there are instances where translators intervene in a more conscious, conspicuous and purposeful way (Miletich, 2013). What are the foundations that serve to propose a justification for interventions? Are all acts of intervention justified? Those benefitting from translation are open to vulnerability, which is a kind of symbolic violence. How should the freedom of stakeholders be treated in translation? Ethics as a system of principles governing individual action plays an important role in decision-making in translation process. This paper deals with the concept of justified intervention and the factors influencing meaning through intervention with a focus on international diplomacy.

## Literature Review

Critical theory in the 20th century mostly consists of approaches based on ideological interpretation and power from post-structuralism to gender studies and from post-colonialism to post-modernity. For instance, Niranjana stresses that the production of knowledge, translation, re-interpretation in the target culture is governed by power relations. Translation is regarded as a practice within the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism (Niranjana, 1992:2).

Translation is a socially regulated activity (Hermans, 1997:10). He gives the concept of norms a major position by focusing on its relevance to power and ideology. Norms are in all stages of translation. The relative interests and positions of the participants play a crucial part in contextualizing the production and reception of translation (Hermans, 1997:42). The patronage system put forth by Andre Lefevere is also determined mainly by ideology and power (Lefevere, 1998:48). Venuti conceives of translation as...cultural, political practice...transgressing values in the target language, and that human action is intentional (Venuti, 1996:206).

Intervention as a translation phenomenon has many implications. Change is the focus of intervention in translation. As one of the prominent translation theorists, House defines intervention as a manipulation of the source text (House, 2008:16). She mentions intervention for ideological, socio-political or ethical reasons. Maier regards intervention as any way in which the outcome of situations involving translations can be affected (Maier, 2007:1). Verschueren conceives of it as the recontextualization of meaning (Verschueren, 2007:79-80). There is a direct link between politics, media and translation. Media reports about political events are forms of re-contextualisation (Schäffner and Bassnett, 2010:2). This shows a difference between 'what is said' and 'what is meant'. The 'intention' of a speech in political discourse is unlikely that it will be a single or straight-forward intention. Re-contextualisation involves the suppression and the filtering of some meaning potentials of a discourse in a new social setting. This illustrates power struggles about identity. It is also a process which may expand meaning potential, through additions and elaborations (Blackledge, 2005:95-121). In his book 'Translation as Intervention', Munday mentions that the interpretation and negotiation of meaning is a form of intervention. Each choice, concious or unconcious, represents an intervention (Munday, 2007:xiii).

**Meaning in the vortex of Intervention and Translation**

Intervention in political discourse has many forms and occurs at different levels. Van Leeuwen and Wodak suggest that transformations of re-contextualisation of a political discourse include (1999: 96):

(i) deletion

(ii) re-arrangement

(iii)substitution and

(iv)addition

In 'deletion', social practice is not represented exactly as it is in the other context. There are careful omissions. In 're-arrangement', social practice may not be in the order in which they occurred. Emphasis may be altered. In 'substitution', social actors will often be given new nominations. There will be a clear substitution of one thing for another. In 'addition', re-contextualisation involves adding new elements to that representation. Additions may include reactions, purposes and legitimations.

Some acts of intervention are justifiable as some certain constraints are active in making decisions and setting strategies in the process of translation. Unjustifiable acts of intervention may

be practised due to such concepts as identity, ideology, power relations, norms, interests, needs and incompetency. These are the inter-relating concepts making intervention happen in translation. Knowledge is deeply related to the politics and the strategies of power. To experience difference is to re-experience identity (Steiner, 1975:381). One of the potential sources of differences and similarities is identity (Gartzke and Gleditsch, 2006:62). Fundamental conflicts usually involve identity-based disputes. Identity covers ideology, opinions, beliefs, and values while power is what makes it possible to implement the strategies employed to attain goals over issues related to identity.

The power relations inherent in the practice of translation and the social implicatedness of translation have an impact on the relations of social factors of dominance to the selection and the shaping of translations (Wolf, 2007:12). Foucault stresses the importantance of power by stating (Foucault 1990: 93):

> "**Power** is **everywhere**; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere....it is the name that one attributes to a complex **strategical situation** in a particular **society.**"

The power to create meanings amounts to authorizing those involved in the translation / interpreting process (Carbonell, 1996: 93). The concept of translators/interpreters as an invisible transporter of meanings is replaced by that of the visible interventionist. Translation thus is not an act of faithful reproduction but, rather a deliberate and concious act of selection, assemblage, structuration and fabrication – and even, in some cases of falsification, refusal of information, counterfeiting and the creation of secret codes (Tymoczko and Gentzler, 2002:xxi). Furhermore, lack of competence ranging from linguistic to cultural or from thematic to knowledge and skills of translating could lead to unconcious / unintentional intervention. To sum up the possible main factors leading to intervention in translation and interpreting, we can take a look at Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Factors Leading to Intervention and Decision-making in Translation

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Identity** | | | | |
| **Ideology** | | **Ethics** | | **Translation** |
| **Power relations** | - | **Professional** | - | **Goals** |
| | ⟹ - | **Organisational** | ⟹ - | **Strategies** |
| **Interests** | - | **Personal** | - | **Decisions** |
| **Needs** | | | | |
| **Incompetency** | | | | |

Freedom is defined as exemption from external control or intervention (Bal, 2014:293). How can stakeholders in a translation activity be free from unjustified translational intervention? Ethics is a system of principles governing morality and acceptable conduct and primarily concerns itself with individual action. For the most part, ethical theories attempt to develop a system of obligations that we have towards others. It is a process of decision-making which draws on these factors and helps stakeholders, whom translators are part of, set goals and strategies, and take decisions to implement them. Ethics is practised at three different levels, which are inter-related and mostly hierarchical: Personal, organisational and professional.

Alvarez and Vidal states that translators are under the pressure of some constraints (Alvarez and Vidal, 1996:6). In addition to dominant institutions and poetical rules, the personal ethics of a translator may be governed by organisational ethics and professional ethics including

general environment conditions such as political, legal, economic and technological conditions in the socio-cultural system, and vice versa. They sets goals and strategies and make decisions in translation. The players don't neccesarily have to practise intervention in a specific translation setting. Where they feel they are in a dilemma, they may choose to do so. There are asymmetrical power relations and each player has their own aims, power and identity in an interlaced way in the socio-cultural system in which they operate.

Organisational constraints affects the behavior of actors and interest groups involved in the policy-making process. The role of various participants shifts the focus of the translation process from texts to agents. Billiani states that where identity, system and order are disturbed, translations are in the firing line (Billiani, 2007:22). Whenever intervention takes place, meaning can be obscure and stakeholders are insecure in some way unless it is justified. Below are three different contexts in which meaning in international diplomacy has been re-contextualised.

**Scene 1**

**Roman Inquisition Charges Made against the Translators**

As a cultural movement, the Renaissance thinkers sought out a revival of learning from ancient texts, typically written in Latin or ancient Greek in order to keep away from the Medieval Christianity. Renaissance thinkers employed humanism that emphasized reason, scientific inquiry, and human fulfillment in the natural world and often rejected the importance of belief in God. During this period, works of classical antiquity were studied and were brought back to life (Christie; 2007:1-2). Étienne Dolet lived in a time when the Church was believed to go through a reform process in which religious reformers from Luther to Calvin had challenged the traditional teachings. Protestantism grew out of the Reformation in 1517 and they eventually broke from the Catholic Church and struggled against the Papal authority. Those who dissented from the officially accepted dogma of the religion was, at that time, labelled as heretic by the Roman Catholic Church. The prosecution at the theological faculty of the Sorbonne judged their offenses especially grave as they presented hard evidence for the charges. As proof for the heretic beliefs the tribunal cited Dolet's recent translation of Plato's *Dialogues* in which, as James Munday explains, he had added the little phrase *rien du tout* ("nothing at all") in a passage about what existed after death (Munday; 2001: 24). He was advocating a radical cultural policy (Bassnett, 1996:14). He was condemned by the Roman Catholic church. As a humanist, Dolet was accused of heresy and atheism, and finally burned at the stake. French humanist Étienne Dolet did the same thing as what William Tyndale (1494–1536) did in England, and Martin Luther (1483–1546) in Germany. They all translated the Bible into their own languages. In *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, Thomas More, well aware of the power of translation as a shaping force in culture, attacked Tyndale by exposing the ideological implications in his translation (Bassnett, 1996:15)

> "Every man knows well that the intent and purpose of my Dialogue was to make men see that Tyndale in his translation changed the common known words in order to make a change in the faith. As for example, he **changed** the word Church into this word congregation, because he would raise the question which the church was, and set forth Luther's heresy that the church which we should believe and obey is not the common known body of all Christian realms remaining in the faith of Christ and not fallen away or cut off with Heresies. . . . . But the church we should believe and obey was some secret unknown kind of evil living and worse believing heretics. And he **changed** priest into senior, because he intended to set forth Luther's heresy teaching that priesthood is no sacrament, but the office of a

> layman or laywoman appointed by the people to preach. And he **changed** penance into repenting, because he would set forth Luther's heresy teaching that penance is no sacrament."

Thomas More acts as a translation critic and describes the changes made in the translation. He focuses on how the conceptual changes pave the way for a social attitude through translation.

**Scene 2**

**Interventions in the Middle-East Peace Initiatives**

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people is one of the most complicated conflicts in modern history. The diplomatic efforts to resolve it is as old as the conflict itself. The most recent efforts came immediately after the collapse of the Camp David II peace negotiations in 2000 and the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada *Al-Aqsa* on September 28, 2000. Those two major events resulted in an atmosphere of political despair and frustration and consequently gave rise to a number of political documents called "peace initiatives," formulated within the general framework of a two-state solution. These initiatives can be seen as attempts by key international and local political players to outline a resolution of the conflict. Since the players are both international and local, the texts have operated in both international and local languages. Most of these documents were written in English and then translated into Hebrew and Arabic.

There was this document known as the "Roadmap Plan". The English text was drafted by the US State Department and put forward by the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations (the "Quartet"), with the details made public on 30 April 2003.

An example of intervention is in the name one chooses for Israel's actions and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territories:

> **Roadmap:** Israel takes measures to improve the humanitarian situation. Israel and Palestinians implement in full all recommendations of the Bertini report to improve humanitarian conditions, lifting **curfews** and easing restrictions on movement of persons and goods, and allowing full, safe, and unfettered access of international and humanitarian personnel.
>
> **US Department of State:** ع رف وتجول الا منع
>
> **Gloss:** and it lifts *curfew*
>
> **Al-Qudsnewspaper:** ع ورف صار الحـ
>
> **Gloss:** and it lifts *siege*
>
> **Peace Now:** מסירים**סגרים**
>
> **Gloss:** lifts *closures*

The intervention is the change from the word "curfews" to the one "siege" in the translation published by *Al-Quds*. Their term *al-hesar* (literally "the siege") is used by the Palestinian people frequently to describe their harsh living conditions under Israeli military occupation, where they feel trapped and persecuted on a daily basis. The same term is used nowadays to describe the tragic situation in the Gaza Strip. The change could be justified as simply adopting the local name for what it refers to, but the local names are by no means neutral. In the translation circulated by the Israeli organization Peace Now, the change happens from the word

"curfews" to "closures". In Hebrew usage, a "curfew" is usually imposed only on a town or city, whereas "closure" is usually imposed on the entire West Bank, particularly during Jewish religious festivities (Ayyad and Pym, 2012:13-14).

**Scene3**

**An Interview with Russian President Putin on the Role of Democracy**

Russian President Putin gave an interview to a group journalists from the G8 countries on June 1, 2007. The interview was conducted via simultaneuos interpreting. Various newspapers reported differently about this interview. *Information Clearing House* has a full transcript of the interview in English. Many newspapers have shorter texts. The information selected for publication differs and is determined mainly by the national political interests. There are also differences in the way the information has been arranged. About the role of democracy in Russia, Putin compared Russia to other countries and his comments contain a reference to Guantanamo (Schäffner and Bassnett, 2010:19-20).

| | |
|---|---|
| **Information Clearing House** | Just look what's happening in North America, it's simply awful: torture, homeless people, Guantanamo, people detained without trial and investigation. |
| **Der Spiegel** | In America wird gefoltert, zum Beispiel in Guantanamo |
| **Spiegel International** | The Americans torture at Guantanamo |
| **Corriere della Sera** | Per esempio noi non abbiamo la pena di morte e nemmeno i senza casa, Guantanamo, la torura |

There are changes in the syntactic and semantic structures, resulting in a change of focus. Both the German and the English version of Spiegel mention only 'torture'. In Spiegel International, there is an active sentence putting the focus on the agents. In *Corriere della Sera*, Putin speaks about Russia only.

**Conclusion**

Research shows that acts of intervention are too many to count. There is intevention ranging from syntax to re-contextualisation. Meaning can be obscure and people are insecure in some way unless intervention is not justified. They are open to vulnerability, which is a kind of symbolic violence. Consequently, where we speak of human action, we may have to speak of conflicts, which is unavoidable at times. Those benefitting from translation are open to vulnerability. Vulnerability is a kind of symbolic violence. Apart from linguistic constraints, social considerations make intervention happen. Ethics is a system of principles governing morality as translation is a **socially-regulated** activity.

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