

Chain translation and intercultural mediation

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Chain translation is a form of translation in which a text is translated from a second or third language into the target language. Klaus Roth (1998) describes chain translation as the translation of texts that have been previously translated into the target language from the author to the researcher in three or four languages. These types of translations are common in written texts as well as in the oral transmission of narratives (Roth 1998: 252).

During student fieldwork on the Balkan migration route in Bihać, one such example was described to me by Anela, who was involved in registering a child born to a family en route in the civil registry. It was necessary to register the newborn in the civil registry, as this is the only way to prove that the child formally exists, thus avoiding the situation in which the child would become stateless. When the parents arrived at the registrar, they had to get a court interpreter and, as no court interpreter in Bosnia and Herzegovina can translate from Pashto, they had to hire an English court interpreter. As none of the family with the newborn spoke English, they brought another migrant who spoke both Pashto and English to the registrar, in addition to the volunteer. So, the family told the English-speaking migrant, or translator as Anela called him, what they wanted in Pashto, he translated it into English, and the court interpreter was supposed to translate into Bosnian. However, the court interpreter did not understand “migrant English”, as Anela called the language used by migrants and locals to communicate with each other, and the translation into Bosnian was impossible. It is worth pointing out that the family communicated easily in English with the locals and volunteers through chain translation, but in front of the registrar, the court interpreter could not perform his role because he did not understand this kind of English. Anela stepped in and translated what they said, as she understood their English and was translating directly into Bosnian.

The interpretation provided by Anela at the registrar could be called ad-hoc interpretation. Ad-hoc interpreters are persons who are not qualified to interpret, and who have only a partial command of the language of the user of a service, as well as of the dominant language of the society or the common language of the environment (Kocijančič Pokorn 2019: 36). This form of interpretation is case-specific, and is only done when necessary (Kocijančič Pokorn 2019: 36). Anela's interpretation was useful for the desired outcome when the need arose. It should be noted, however, that she was not qualified to do so. At this point, we should also note the issue of intercultural mediation, which proved to be more practical than official interpretation in the case presented. Indeed, intercultural mediation in Slovenia presupposes professionally trained, certified individuals who are familiar with the background of the people on the move and ensure successful communication with the institutions (Škraban and Lipovec Čebren 2021: 18). Margalit Cohen-Emerique defines the work of intercultural mediators in terms of the types of tasks they are expected to perform. Her definition includes four types. The first is related to the function of facilitating contact, more specifically facilitating communication and understanding between the two parties. In addition to interpreting, this type of mediation also includes providing information, accompanying users and helping them find their way around the system. The second type allows for the clarification of misunderstandings, resentments and tensions, which are not only the result of ignorance of the different cultural codes and values of others, but also of prejudices and stereotypes (Cohen-Emerique 2007: 11-12).

Referring again to the above example, it can be deduced that when the volunteer was trying to translate the messages at the registrar's office, she was in fact acting more as a cross-cultural mediator. In this context, we should point out that several of our interlocutors in the field had learnt English on the migrant route. Individual local people - supporters of people on the move - learned English when the migrants arrived in their area. It is worth pointing out that this is not a form of English that can be compared to the English language norm, but a form of language that would probably be rated at a basic level (A1/A2) in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Some individuals thus have a limited vocabulary, essential for everyday communication. It would be premature to claim that individuals in the area have developed their own linguistic code during their journey, but it is safe to say that individuals are incorporating words from their first languages into English. Individuals who spend more time with them thus understand this communication more easily than someone who has systematically learned English in the school system.

This is where the important advantage of intercultural mediation comes into play, which also considers the background of a community, which of course must not be homogenised, but can nevertheless derive some cultural characteristics that may be more familiar to the intercultural mediator than to the official interpreter. In the situation presented, the chain transmission of information, even if things were lost in translation, served the ultimate purpose - registering the child in the civil registry. However, we should also be aware of the pitfalls of

omitting information in a chain translation, for example in the health sector, etc. The impact of language barriers in formal situations can lead to migrants being treated differently. Institutional unresponsiveness to such language barriers can exacerbate racist attitudes towards migrants and ethnic minorities (Lipovec Čebon 2021: 2).

1/7/2022

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