

## THE (UN)SUSPECTED HAND OF TRANSLATION ORCHESTRATING LANGUAGE CHANGE

### Abstract

This paper deals with the role of translation on language change under conditions of language contact. Translation has always been given a dubious role in studies of Language Contact and there has been much discussion as to whether language change is internal or whether translation is one of the external factors contributing to change. Researchers of language contact look for visible outcomes, mostly syntactic change, which can be formalized in line with the popular theory or model of the day. However, the process usually takes on a less dramatic form than expected and can easily disappoint the researcher. This paper gives two such taken-for-granted examples from Turkish; the age-old Persian loan ‘eđer’ used in conditional sentences, and the extremely grammaticalized form ‘olan’ used in relative clauses. It is discussed that both are the products of translation across time.

### 1. Background

Language Contact has been defined as a situation of geographical and/or social proximity between communities resulting in mutual influence between languages and dialects (Kurtböke 1998). The context of immigration is one of the ways in which languages come into contact. Being confronted with speakers of a new language in the host country may lead to new options of communication for the migrant community.

Migrants<sup>1</sup> obtain a major part of the information about the host country and its culture through translation. Most documents containing vital information in the areas of social security, health, legal services and so on, are made available in a variety of languages for migrants in countries with regular migrant intake such as Australia. While translated information plays a crucial role in the life of the non-English speaking migrant, translated texts are rarely included in language contact research. Regardless, translation is not often taken seriously in linguistics and related disciplines (Baker 1993). This stems from the fact that, translation, like bilingualism, “cuts across many disciplines without really belonging to any of them” and is “not fully understood” (Delisle 1988:19).

Translation and bilingualism are found to be coextensive as translation as a skill develops with the ability to establish similarities and differences across languages. In a contact setting then, it can be claimed that with the

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<sup>1</sup> Some issues discussed in this paper were part of a presentation entitled ‘Migrants Mediation Mixed Code’ at BAAL Annual Meeting in Birmingham in 1997.

development of bilingualism, the translating ability develops, as well (Kurtböke 1995, 1998)<sup>2</sup>.

Oksaar (1976:303) finds similarities between the translator and the bilingual individual:

The translator has, of course, a somewhat different approach to the dynamic field of language from a bilingual in his everyday interaction, disregarding the fact that he is a bilingual himself. During the process of translating, however, he will often face the same problems as to the exactitude of the message and the means of the language as the bilingual.

Both the migrant and the translator are constantly under pressure to come up with a *translation equivalent* of new words. However, non-equivalence across languages is a well-known problem and the choice of a suitable equivalent in a given context depends on various factors as well as the development of various strategies.

It is known that whenever a translation problem occurs, a series of fixed solutions are mobilized, and the frequent use of certain patterns in languages can be explained with reference to such fixed solutions developed under pressure in bilingual context (Toury 1995:252).

Those real-life situations are typically met by migrants everyday and lead to the emergence of L1+L2 patterns as 'fixed solutions' mobilized under contact conditions. An example of such a strategy is the use of *denilen* 'called' and the Turkish translation each time an English word appears in Turkish text:

1	concession card	denilen	tenzilat kartý
2	multitrip	denilen	biletler
3	minipill	denilen	hap
4	'take away'	denilen	hazýr yemek çeþitleri
5	register	denilen	bu kayýt defteri
6	Appeals Tribunal	denilen	kurulu <sup>o</sup>
7	reef	denilen	kayalýk bölgeler
8	Record Form	denilen	bir belge

Thus, the frequency of occurrence of certain patterns and word forms in the language increases. However, in search of much more seemingly dramatic signs of language contact, the language contact researcher will hardly notice an element like 'denilen' as it does not disturb the syntax of natural Turkish. Nor does it appear in any dictionary as an individual entry, as it seems very ordinary indeed, regardless of the frequency of occurrence.

This following section highlights two such cases emerging out of language contact with no disturbing effect to the native speaker of Turkish. The examples are set against a background of corpus research.

## 2. Corpus

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<sup>2</sup> However, it should be recognized that "bilingualism alone is not sufficient preparation for professional translation" (Delisle 1988:19).

Until recently translated texts have been excluded by many corpus builders in Europe from their corpora on the grounds that translated texts were not representative and they might distort our view of the 'real' language (Baker 1993). However, with the shift of emphasis in translation studies from *source* and *target* texts to the nature of the *translated* text, this negative view has begun to change. Also the developments in corpus research and computer technology over the last three decades are currently showing their impact on translation studies (Sinclair *et al* 1996).

Examples are taken from the *Ozturk Corpus*, a collection of newspaper texts, published over a period of 15 years (1980-1995) by the Turkish Community in Australia. The aim in creating the corpus was to investigate the use of English words in Turkish text in terms of collocation and co-selection, and to propose mixed units such as *delivery yapılyr* 'deliveries can be arranged' as the starting point of change (Kurtböke 1998) in Australian Turkish.

Sample texts in the corpus came from some six newspapers with regular publishing activity representing different political and religious ideologies. A smaller set of texts also came from another relevant source often neglected in migrant research, information leaflets, regularly published by the Australian federal and state governments, public institutions and community organizations in various community languages on a number of key topics such as Health, Human Rights and Employment. This smaller set of texts was originally written in English. The newspaper texts and information leaflets collected to build the corpus total 1000.

## 2.1 Case Study (I)

Thomason and Kaufman (1988:217) list a number of borrowed functors in Asia Minor Greek, which was heavily pressured by Turkish. Among these there is EDER 'if', a Persian borrowing into Turkish itself. My aim in choosing this functor is twofold; a) to argue against the assumptions that functors are free from structural considerations, b) to discuss that in translated texts it causes the 'engrossing effect' (Baker 1992). As all lexical choices we make, they also show collocational and colligational preferences. First let us consider some of the occurrences of *eđer* in the Ozturk corpus:

- |    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
| 9  | <b>Eđer</b> evinizde merdiven varsa...                   | 'if there's a staircase in your house...' |
| 10 | <b>Eđer</b> bebek kayar veya sýkýpýrsa...                | 'if the baby slips and gets stuck...'     |
| 11 | <b>Eđer</b> Homeswest kiracýsý <b>iseniz</b> ...         | 'if you're a Homewest customer...'        |
| 12 | <b>Eđer</b> hüküm sona erdiy <b>se</b> ne yapmalýyým...  | 'if the sentence has been served...'      |
| 13 | <b>Eđer</b> okuldan ayrýlmayý düþünüyors <b>anız</b> ... | 'if you're thinking of leaving school...' |

This functor is always present in the environment of a conditional construction that operates through the verbal suffix *-(i)se* in Turkish. Very frequently in the corpus, 151 times out of a total of 177 occurrences it is found in the sentence-initial position. In the remaining 26 cases, this word is found in non-sentence-initial position although it has a strong tendency to stay close to the beginning of the sentence as in:

- |    |            |                                  |                                      |
|----|------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 14 | Avustralya | <b>eđer</b> cumhuriyet olursa... | 'if Australia becomes a republic...' |
|----|------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|

- 15 Bu süre sonunda **eđer** göç programý... 'if at the end of this period, the migration program...'
- 16 Derneklerin görevi **eđer** o insan bunalýmdaysa... 'if the individual is under stress, the support organisations' responsibility is...'
- 17 Bunu yaparken **eđer** iki ayrý toplum arasýnda... 'if between the two communities...'
- 18 Bunun da **eđer** istersek kolayca önlenebileceđini... 'if, we choose to, this can be avoided...'

On the basis of the concordance lines above (9-13 and 14-18), we can establish two conditions for the use of *eđer* in Turkish. The co-presence of the conditional *ise* or its suffix form *-se* or *-sa* must be attached to the verb, and *eđer* must occupy a sentence initial or near sentence-initial position.

In the light of this observation, let us reconsider Thomason and Kaufman's (1988:217) individually borrowed functors in Asia Minor Greek. Can we assume that *eđer* was borrowed without any impact on its environment? They report that Turkish imposed changes on Asia Minor Greek also at morphological and syntactic levels, and mention some characteristics along these lines. However, there is neither reference to the co-dependence of *eđer* and *ise* as such, nor is there any reference to the preferred position of Turkish *eđer* in Greek sentences. Yet, it is difficult to think that a grammatical word, which carries such constraints along with it, can be borrowed like any other lexeme.

There is another point worth considering with respect to the frequency of *eđer* in the Ozturk corpus. In most cases in Turkish, the sheer presence of *ise* is enough to realize the conditional and it makes *eđer* redundant. This is supported by corpus evidence in that there are 338 occurrences of *ise*, without counting its *-se/sa* forms, as opposed to 177 occurrences of *eđer*. As mentioned above, a set number of texts that make up the corpus were originally written in English and later translated into Turkish. If we look at the texts in which *eđer* occurs, we can see that 101 of these come from translated brochures or government advertisements. This tells us that the tendency to keep *eđer* while translating if-initial sentences into Turkish from English is very strong. Yet, such subtle differences can only be observed through frequency counts and the presence or the lack of 'eđer' in naturally-occurring Turkish sentences will hardly strike the researcher as a special case. Such an observation is of course only possible if translated texts are made part of the corpus material, and the two types of sentences can be counted.

## 2.2 Case study (II)

In the corpus, OL- is used over 6500 times across 450 types. Some 60 of these forms display significant frequencies varying between ten and almost a thousand times. If we create a scale based on significant frequencies and place these forms along, it is possible to see which forms of OL- have reached the stage of complete grammaticalization, that is, which forms have begun acting as function words.

The most common dictionary translation of OL- is 'be, become' and happen'. Although it is unhelpful to translate frequent OL- forms, particularly out of context. At the top of the list, the most common of OL- forms, OLAN should

be treated individually as the frequency of occurrence increases sharply and the grammatical function becomes prominent. Roughly, we can say that, OLAN (984) has occurred once in each text in the corpus. This frequency is significant and places this form of OL- among the 10 most common words in the corpus. This overwhelming rate of occurrence makes one wonder why no other form of OL-<sup>3</sup> shows such a degree of grammaticalization. And the answer lies in the impact of translation on language change.

It is known that Turkish has no relative clause construction as in Indo-European languages and the Persian conjunction 'ki' has been borrowed in order to render the Indo-European structure in Turkish. Alternatively, OLAN takes on the role of organizing relative constructions. In the corpus, the frequent use of OLAN with the preceding verb ending in '-mekte/makta' suffix clearly illustrates this function:

- 19 soyu tüken**mekte olan** bazı hayvanlar... 'animals which are facing extinction'
- 20 şu anda kullanılmakta **olan** bilet sistemi... 'the ticketing system which is being used at the moment'
- 21 depolarda çalışmakta **olan** işçilerden bini... 'a thousand of the workers who are working in the warehouses'
- 22 Victoria da oturmakta **olan** birçok göçmen... 'a number of migrants who are living in Victoria'
- 23 düzenlenmekte **olan** törenler... 'the ceremonies that are being organised'

When the English relative pronoun is in the nominative, the translation is rendered by OLAN as in the examples above or as  $-mi^0+olan$ ,  $-ecek+olan$  and so on (Lewis 1967:260), equally common in the corpus. When the frequency of occurrence is so high, the grammaticalization process is complete and there is no trace of the meaning 'be' in this form. It is not too ambitious to say that this is a change brought about, and accelerated by translation over time. Given that Turkish has been in contact with Indo-European languages for over a thousand years, it is difficult to say when exactly this change has occurred. It is, however, obvious that without some external force (e.g. translation), this particular word form would not have gone through such an extreme phase of grammaticalization.

### 3. Discussion

Over the past two decades, grammaticalization has become the centre of attention with the end product often presented as a dependent form such as a clitic, a particle, an auxiliary or an affix destined to complete disappearance over time. As corpus research gained momentum in 1980s and 90s to produce a new generation of dictionaries and grammar books, it also became possible to systematically illustrate how languages have been changing. The treatment of words in terms of word forms has also provided a significant change of direction in linguistic research. It has become clear that not all forms of a lemma go through the same process of change, and those that do, proceed at different speed rates.

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<sup>3</sup> The other most frequent form is OLARAK with a similar frequency but an analysis of this form is not within the scope of this article.

Linguistic change, stimulated by such processes as grammaticalization, is observed to be extremely slow under unilingual conditions (e.g. Bybee 1998). However, in cases of language contact, 'degrees of change which in an unilingual situation will take many generations may [...] be realized in one' (Mackey 1970). These statements assume that purely unilingual conditions exist and have always existed. However, the bilingual's translation activity never stops and whether it is carried out by an individual translator or a community of migrants, translation does start and accelerates linguistic change to a remarkable extent.

Language contact researchers desperately studied how the foreign material in languages could best be analyzed, and distinguished from instant uses (interference vs. integration). This task, however, has rarely had a satisfactory outcome as the methodological bottleneck has always been there. Mackey called the belief that 'one could describe a language as if at any point in time it were stable', a fiction and claimed that the synchronic description was unsuited to language contact data. His solution in part was to count the frequency of occurrence, a key notion in today's Corpus Linguistics. It is now possible to examine, particularly if the corpus in hand has a historical dimension, the development of a particular form of a lemma across time. What the texts of recent Turkish migration reveal in this study is that these forms are reinforced each time Turkish comes into contact with other languages.

#### **4. Conclusion and a call to join the forces**

Translation research has been mainly concerned with the relationship between *target* and *source* texts and the question of equivalence. Similarly, Language Contact research has mainly concerned itself with the relationship between L1 and L2 although the emphasis has been on the structural make-up of its outcome as opposed to the preoccupation with meaning in translation. Both areas of study, however, have paid little attention to the change process in its own right. Also, the principles of bilingual production and the constraints under which it operates have been central to both language contact and translation research but a satisfactory theoretical model has not been offered yet. Unfortunately, contextual interpretation of data (i.e. the verbal context) has not played an important role in Language Contact since the emphasis on the social context in which L1+L2 interaction takes place has removed the focus of the study away from the usage for decades. In Translation, on the other hand, there has been very strong emphasis on meaning, and usage has not been taken into consideration, also because large corpora made up of same types of texts have not come into translation research until recently (see Sinclair *et al* 1996 for a review) .

While the words *corpus* and *corpora* have figured "prominently in the literature on translation", and in Language Contact study for that matter, "they do not refer to the same kind of corpora" used in computational corpus research." Corpora in translation studies have so far been very modest affairs (Baker 1993) as they have also in Language Contact research, although for different reasons. So far, language contact research has dealt

mainly with spoken texts. And the search has been manual, until relatively recently, for instances of transfer.

From the point of view of Language Contact research, the outcome of a translation activity typically includes transfer and this may also be observed in the form of code-switching. In fact, the use of loans is one of the common strategies used by translators and bilinguals at large (Kurtböke and Potter 2000).

Yet another common aspect shared by Language Contact and Translation is the search for universals. In Language contact the search has concentrated on syntactic constraints whereas in Translation Studies the search for universals has focused on textual features (see Baker 1993 for a review).

The process of change brought about by translation, an area where languages come directly in contact, can be better explained if translators and language contact researchers work together in the exploitation of large collections of written and spoken data, and share the methodologies at work in their respective fields. Many other fields, "Psychology, sociology, linguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics could all shed light on" these multifaceted phenomena (Delisle 1988:19) no matter how badly the earlier attempts for an *integrated framework* have failed (Kurtböke 1998).

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