The Semiotic School of Tartu-Moscow: The Cultural ‘Circuit’ of Translation

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The Tartu-Moscow School has significantly influenced Semiotics as a discipline. This School established a theoretical framework for the semiotics of culture under the influence of the Russian semioticians, and in particular of Mikhail Bakhtin. In this paper, I will illustrate how translation studies could benefit from the insights of cultural semiotics, rather than trace the minimal exchange between cultural semiotics and translation theory. It is true that The Tartu-Moscow School broadened the notion of translation in a very defined and innovative way, based on a series of notions such as cultural act, text, semiotic system, translation, intersemiosis, heterocommunication, autocommunication. I will use these notions to illustrate some examples of cultural translation, and in particular, that of the translation of the culturally charged utterances from and into Greek, while at the same time exploring the field of autocommunication. I will try to demonstrate that the most important contribution of the Tartu-Moscow School is the correlation of the concept of culture with the concept of translation.

[A] Introduction

The Tartu-Moscow School has had an enormous influence on Semiotics as a discipline, where the School helped found Cultural Semiotics\(^1\) and received the influence of the Russian semioticians, and in particular of Mikhail Bakhtin. Juri-Mikhailovich Lotman is considered the most eminent scholar of the Tartu-Moscow School. His work on the process of translation, which enriches and broadens the field and the discipline considerably, is far less known than the rest of his work. Bakhtin's and Lotman's contributions bring together two traditions of cultural semiotics, a combination where the concepts of dialogue, culture, the polyphonic text and translation are examined and understood in a common context. Peeter Torop is among the main representatives of the Tartu-Moscow School today, focusing on translation semiotics.

The importance of translation is one of the central principles that unite all of Lotman’s work. However, the work of the Tartu-Moscow School on translation studies is not well known. While classical semiotics which is influenced by Saussure, have provided indispensable tools for linguistics and translation alike, the work of USPENSKIJ et al. (2003 [1973]), their *Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures (As Applied to Slavic Texts)*, has hardly become a standard reference for translation scholars.

Here I will try to show in which ways translation studies could benefit from the insights of cultural semiotics, rather than trace the minimal exchange between cultural

\(^1\) According to POSNER (2005: 308), “cultural semiotics is that subdiscipline of semiotics which has culture as its subject. According to Cassirer, it has two tasks: a) the study of *sign systems in a culture* (in the sense of Herder or Tylor) with respect to what they contribute to the culture, b) the study of *cultures as sign systems* with respect to the advantages and disadvantages which an individual experiences in belonging to a specific culture”.

semiotics and translation theory. It is interesting that from Juri Lotman to Peeter Torop to Göran Sonesson to Paolo Fabbri semioticians following the Tartu-Moscow School have always worked with the notion of translation on the cultural analytical scale. And so have the French School and Umberto Eco – it is no accident that Eco wrote the introduction to the *Universe of Mind. A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (LOTMAN 1990). Eco’s ideas of negotiation are deeply indebted to Lotmanian semiotics which is based on the idea of *dialogue*\(^2\). According to ECO\(^3\), Lotman is a critic who started from a structuralist approach, but who does not remain bound by it.

[A] Cultural communication and translation from the perspective of the Tartu-Moscow School

First of all, translation refers to a concrete practice. In his seminal article in 1959, *On linguistic aspects of translation*, Roman Jakobson stated that translation proper is only interlingual translation, and as a consequence all other types of translation, like intralingual or intersemiotic translation, derive from this prototype. PEETERS (1999: 17) has gone as far as to say that while intralingual translation belongs to the field of study of linguistics, intersemiotic translation belongs to semiotics, while interlingual translation to translation studies. Here a sociosemiotic taxonomy seems to position itself very far apart from the totalizing and all-encompassing concepts of cultural semiotics.

On the other hand, for TOROP (2002: 603), “in the discipline of the semiotics of culture it comes naturally to say that culture is translation, and also that translation is culture”, in the sense that meaning is always something to be transferred from one locus to another, and this metaphorical act is at once an act of translation and an act of culture. It is worth noting that not only semioticians, but culture scholars also, correlate culture and translation. Thus, for FISHER (2007: 1), “the challenge of cultural analysis is to develop translation and mediation tools for helping make visible differences of interests, access, power, needs, desires, and philosophical perspective”. But how do we reconcile Torop’s and Jakobson’s positions? And is it fruitful to do so? Is the Tartu-Moscow School really qualified to offer new ideas for understanding the particularity of translation as an act of communication?

The Tartu-Moscow School broadened the notion of translation in a very defined and innovative way, based on a series of notions such as cultural act, text, semiotic system, translation, intersemiosis, autocommunication. SÜTISTE & TOROP (2007: 202) mention that “as the concept of translation broadens, it approaches the concept of understanding - understanding through translation and understanding the translation itself. To understand different kinds of translation means to understand both communication and autocommunication processes […]”. More precisely, the Tartu-Moscow School theses for cultural communication can be summarized as follows:

[B] Cultural act-text-semiotic system

Every cultural act that is a carrier of meaning is text. Every text is a semiotic system. For Tartu-Moscow School, language is not used in the sense of a natural language but in the “specifically semiotic sense” described by USPENSKIJ et al. (2003 [1973]: 297), which is applied “also to any carrier of integral (‘textual’) meaning – to a ceremony, a work of the fine arts, or a piece of music” (ibid.). This came as no surprise. KRISTEVA (1969: 200) realized quite early that, contrary to the opinion of Western semioticians, notably French, for Soviet

\(^2\) For LOTMAN (2005 [1984]), “meaning without communication is not possible. In this way, we might say that dialogue precedes language and gives birth to it”.

\(^3\) See Eco’s introduction in LOTMAN (1990: ix).
Semiotics that linguistic description does not suffice to elucidate what a text is. This particular stance surpasses the limits of the Tartu-Moscow School, and it has become a common place for all Schools of Semiotics. It also reflects the words of LOTMAN (2009 [1992]: 115) who mentions that “contemporary semiotic study considers text as one of the basic research concepts, but text itself is considered as a functional rather than a stable object with constant properties”. It is a fact that the concept of functionality of the text has aided towards the development of disciplines which deal with text such as Text Linguistics and of the Theory of Literature. For TOROP (2014: 58) the text remains a ‘middle’ concept for cultural semiotics “since as a term it can denote both a discrete artifact and an invisible abstract whole (a mental text in collective consciousness or subconsciousness)”.

[B] Text-cultural act-translation

As a consequence of the aforementioned proposals of the Tartu-Moscow School, if every text can be translated, every cultural act can be translated. ANDREWS & MAKSIMOVA (2008: 263) aptly observe that “for Lotman, all communication, as well as any and all cultural acts, are semiotic and as such, require some form of translation in order for meaning to be potentially generated”4. More specifically, for LOTMAN & PIATIGORSKIJ (1969: 211), a message can be considered a text when it is “open to later translations and interpretations”, a thesis which SONESSON (1998: 83) later reformulates: “[the text] may also be described as that which is (should or could be) subject to interpretation”.

This leads to the position of the French School of Semiotics on the translatable of all semiotic systems, even though a large portion of modern semiotics produces fewer models of translation among different semiotic systems, as FABBRI (2008: 161) observes. Thus, for GREIMAS and COURTÉS (1993: 398), translatable seems to be one of the fundamental properties of semiotic systems and forms the basis of the semantic process. Semiotic systems can be translated, and their translation is the process where informational loss occurs, whether because of a strategic choice of the producer of the cultural text, or as the effect of cultural dynamics.

[B] Informational loss and equivalence in the context of cultural communication

LOTMAN (1964: 87) states that “a linguist is interested in the text as testimonial resource about language structure and not about the information that is contained to the message”. I will agree with Lotman adding that information contained to the message belongs to the field of study of semiotics and translation. An interesting question to answer is what would informational loss5 (a notion from translation proper) mean in the context of cultural communication? These two notions are connected to the notion of semiosphere, a notion introduced by Lotman. According to him:

the semiosphere is that same semiotic space, outside of which semiosis itself cannot exist’

[and] [...] One of the fundamental concepts of semiotic delimitation lies in the notion of ‘boundary’ [...] . Just as in mathematics the border represents a multiplicity of points, belonging simultaneously to both the internal and external space, the semiotic border is

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4 The broadness of the notion of translation according to Lotman is surprising. For LOTMAN (2009 [1992]: 6), “[...] even the nature of the intellectual act could be described in terms of being a translation, a definition of meaning as a translation from one language to another, whereas extra-lingual reality may be regarded as yet another type of language”.

5 According to JAKOBSON (2004 [1959]: 141), “[...] the richer the context of a message, the smaller the loss of information”. See also GORLÉE (1994: 168).
represented by the sum of bilingual translatable ‘filters’, passing through which the text is translated into another language (or languages), situated outside the given semiosphere [...]. In order for these to be realised, they must be translated into one of the languages of its internal space, in other words, the facts must be semioticized. (LOTMAN 2005 [1984]: 208-209)

In simple terms the semiosphere includes all these signs which belong to a cultural system and which in my opinion are not only a first but also a second order of signs. In other words, they are an inscription of cultural information. For LOTMAN (2005 [1984]: 215): ‘the translation of information through these borders […] gives birth to meaning, generating new information’.

The notion of borders poses an interesting question: what are the limits of semiospheres as opposed to translatability processes intervening in the cultural system? I could schematize a first response to this seemingly purely theoretical question: When one semiosphere is translated into another an intermediate semiosphere is temporarily created which is then suppressed – this is the semiosphere carrying the informational loss and the rhetorical mechanisms responsible for this loss – let us say the political management of signifieds.

The aim of this intermediate, temporary semiosphere (the “rhetorical technique”, the medium, the “metaphorical smoke”, the hard to detect perceptual switch) is to produce the effect of equivalence signifieds. For LOTMAN (1977: 96): “at the basis of every act of exchange lies the contradictory formula, ‘equivalent but different’: the first part of the formula makes an exchange technically possible and the second part makes it meaningful in content”. The translated semiosphere has to appear more or less intact in its translated representation and this semblance of formal equivalence, i.e. equivalence of signifiers of the two semiotic systems, is the job of this intermediate semiosphere, the sphere where informational loss is, as it were, manufactured. This notion of an intermediate sphere is useful, even though it creates an ad absurdum infinite creation of semiospheres for it accounts for the fact that semiosis occurs within systems of meanings with different, competing, cross-destuctive, or cross-complementary (even self-destructive) semantic values.

The contribution of the notion of equivalence in cultural translatability, as a function of controlling informational loss, has often been underlined by scholars of the semiotics of culture. According to USPENSKIJ et al. ([1973] 2003: 311), “translation from one system of text to another always includes a certain element of untranslatability”. Untranslatability is detected in the function of equivalence from one semiotic system to another. Translation will draw its informational material from those elements that the translated and the translatable semiospheres have in common and to this task the contribution of intersemiotic translation seems very useful.

[B] Intersemiotic translation

Even though intersemiotic translation was excluded from Translation Studies by many translation scholars, the answer is straightforward from a semiotic perspective: If any text (semiotic system) can be translated, non-verbal semiotic systems can also be translated and this permits the development of the notion of intersemiotic translation. The first to define intersemiotic translation was JAKOBSON (2004 [1959]: 139): “intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign

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6 According to LOTMAN (1990: 125), cultural texts “relate to each other along the spectrum which runs from complete translatability to just a complete mutual untranslatability”. For Lotman’s influence on translation studies see also GORLÉE (1994: 19-21).
Jakobson’s stance was introduced within a European environment which was under the influence of the French School of Semiotics (especially of Roland Barthes, of Algirdas-Julien Greimas, and of Julia Kristeva) which had already started to promote the concept of the synergy of semiotic systems in the production of meaning in the first and second reading of the message and the concept of intersemiosis. Though none of them actually mentioned intersemiotic translation, their positions on the relationship between verbal and non-verbal semiotic systems created a field of reference where Lotman’s ideas could be welcomed. Lotman too, indirectly refers to intersemiotic relationships between semiotic systems (to multimodality) in stating that “it may now be possible to suggest that, in reality, clear and functionally mono-semantic systems do not exist in isolation” (LOTMAN 2005 [1984]: 206). This stance allows for the development and the dispersion of the concept of intersemiosis. TOROP (2002: 602) states that, what he would like to contend “is that the situation that has arisen in translation studies is in many of its aspects […] a situation concerned with the theory of culture. This has been grasped in the semiotics of culture by introducing intersemiosis beside the concept of semiosis”. More specifically:

Intersemiotic translation reflects the features of contemporary culture, where the ‘own’ as well as ‘alien’ texts are translated into different types of texts, and as matter of fact, become intertexts and the description of the existence of text in culture requires a topological approach. At the same time the intertextual process is included into the intermedia process, and every text not only generates its meaning in different sign systems, but materialises in different media. It is the process of intersemiosis in which texts in different sign systems coexist as different texts and the same time represent a certain text, against the background of which shifts and digressions in the plane of content and the plane of expression are interpreted. (TOROP 2003: 274)

The most characteristic description of such a thesis, also supported by many of the Tartu-Moscow scholars, has been offered by Vladimir Toporov, though he does not escape from the Soviet academic reflex of presupposing an essentialist view of ‘culture’. TOPOROV (1992: 30) writes: “[culture] is not only the place where meanings are born, but the space in which they are being exchanged, ‘transmitted’ and seeks to be translated from one cultural language into another”. Culture and translation are tightly connected and thus intersemiosis does not appear as a result of this relationship but as its constitutive part.

[A] Cultural translation as an educating system

Cultural translation is connected not only to heterocommunication, but also to auto-communication. Jakobson does not propose only one model of communication where the message is transmitted from the sender to the receiver but also makes mention of an intrapersonal communication (autocommunication). More precisely:

When speaking of language as communicative tool, one must remember that its primary role, interpersonnal comunication, which bridges space, is supplemented by a no less important function which may be characterized as interpersonnal communication […] While interpersonnal communication bridges space, intrapersonal communication proves to be the chief vehicle for bridging time. (JAKOBSON 1985 [1974]: 98)

7 Torop, though speaking specifically of the arts, can assist in reestablishing the position of linguistic systems in intersemiotic translation by repeating the idea of a ‘partial overlap’ of signs in different systems. More precisely, for TOROP (2004: 64), ‘the intersemiotic aspect of culture is due to the partial overlap of signs and languages or sign systems of different arts – first, on the level of independent existence of these languages and texts created in them (e.g. film and theater)’.
Autocommunication is distinguished from the more traditionally studied form of communication where the sender and the receiver of the message are separate (hetero-communication). Where hetero-communication gives the receiver new information, autocommunication does not. Instead it enhances and restructures the receiver's ego. As LOTMAN (1990: 22) mentions that “[…] while communicating with him/herself, the addresser inwardly reconstructs his/her essence, since the essence of a personality may be thought of as an individual set of socially significant codes, and this set changes during the act of communication”. Both forms of communication can be found either in individuals or within organisations. LOTMAN (2001 [1990]: 21) states that “the case of a subject transmitting a message to him/herself, i.e. to a person who it knows it already, appears paradoxical. Yet it occurs quite frequently and has an important part to play in the general system of culture”. It is true that the Jakobsian system of communication allows merely to transmit a constant quantity of information, while the Lotmanian proposal transforms [I could say translate] the information” (LOTMAN 2001 [1990]: 22). This is also supported by PORTIS-WINNER (1994: 164) who argues that “both Peirce and Lotman find that fundamental activity of semiosis underlying all texts is autocommunication which involves the reformulating of the message through new codes and thus new meanings”.

The notion of autocommunication is not only typical of religious and artistic works, it is also fundamental to culture as an educating system, focusing on identity formation, repetition and communicative dialogue. TOROP (2008: 254) mentions that “a fundamental principle of Lotman’s semiotics of culture is regarding culture as an educating system. Translation as a certain type of texts of culture takes part in this process of educating bearers of culture”. More precisely:

[…] in Lotman’s semiotics of culture the differentiation between communication and autocommunication is relevant: in this view culture is continuously analyzing, describing, educating, developing itself, and for that purpose, creating autocommunicative or self-models for itself. […] The entering of translations into culture and translation culture as an integral part of culture works according to the same principal. There are translations that support the existing situation and thus so to say belong to the culture’s own repertoire, and then there are translations whose aim is to innovate culture. (TOROP 2008: 254)

The concept of autocommunication has not been studied extensively by translation scholars, while in my opinion it comprises an indispensable part of the translation process. It is part of a cognitive function of the translator which precedes the final outcome of the translatum. We should note here that translator’s draft have been themselves objects of study. Eye-tracker based research can also be included within the framework of autocommunication for it involves the cognitive path followed by the translator of interlingual translation.

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8 Prayers, mantras and diaries are considered to be good examples of auto-communication. But any text (or work) can become autocommunicaional if it is read many times over. One example of that would be a child repeating a word that he/she has just heard while trying to connect this word to an object or notion. Another example would be the fundamental act of trying to mentally digest the grammar of a foreign language. Education is a way of adapting our mind (mental apparatus) to other ways of thinking.

9 For SCHÖNLE (2002: 433), “autocommunication, as Lotman describes it, resembles what cultural studies calls hybridization, the process by which individuals or communities appropriate external cultural products by investing them with their own functions and meaning”.
Cultural communication: some examples

Within this context I would like to present two examples of cultural translation using the European semiosphere as an intermediate semiosphere for the translation from Greek (Ego) to Peruvian Spanish (Alter), and from Mexican Spanish (Alter) to Greek (Ego), based on PETRILLI’s (2003: 50) observations that “[…] interlingual translation only concerns the point of departure and arrival while all the intermediary interpretative work is of a semiotic order”, and that “[…] the text can be ‘transferred’ from one historical natural language into another on the basis of intersemiotic translation”.

Should I want to translate a culturally charged Greek utterance like e.g. ‘τσαρούχι’ [tsarouhi] into Peruvian Spanish, then my first step would be to proceed to an intersemiotic translation from word to image, since ‘tsarouhi’ does not have a signified object in this cultural semiotic system, i.e. people don’t know what it is, or what it looks like (and thus we can visualize it as first signified which is that of ‘kind of Greek shoe’). ‘Tsarouhi’ belongs to the Greek semiosphere. The semiosphere close to Peruvian that is most familiar to the Greek semiosphere is Peninsular Spanish. The Greek and Peninsular Spanish semiospheres share common/overlapping cultural semiotic ground. Within this I can search for an ‘equivalence’, i.e. what did Spaniards wear before the establishment of the modern army shoes before examining what kind of shoes the Peruvian Presidential Guard wear. The Greek cultural ego and its Spanish counterpart form a broader European cultural ego. From this European ego we must find a way to address Spanish as cultural alter-the Other, which has no equivalent cultural experience. The Spanish semiosphere functions as an intermediate semisphere-with elements of Greek Ego and of Peruvian Ego. Thus, intersemiotic translation could be a perquisite of linguistic translation (equivalence), an observation that reminds us of TOROP’s (2001: 211) position that Semiotics of translation brings the analysis of interlingual translation closer to intersemiotic translation.

Tsarouhi (fig. 2) is a Greek traditional shoe that means: “Handmade leather shoe with or without pompoms for men or women” (NATIONAL HISTORICAL MUSEUM et al. 2005: 271). It refers to a Greek cultural utterance, which is very difficult to translate into Peruvian Spanish because there does not exist this kind of shoe in Peru where all relevant types of

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10 A tsarouhi is a type of shoe, which is typically known nowadays as part of the traditional uniform worn by the Greek guards known as Evzones.

11 The notion of ‘equivalence’ in cultural semiotics is very aptly expressed by Toury. For TOURY (2012: 85), “rather than being a single relationship, anchored in a recurring invariant, it now refers to any relation which is found to have characterized translation under a specific set of circumstances”.
shoes are of the sandal type, as the indigenous people of these regions do not wear winter shoes as they have to cross rivers.

The semisphere that could intermediate for the translation of this term is the Spanish semisphere. In Spain there are no ‘closed’ or winter leather shoes which are similar to the Greek ‘tsarouhi’. There is the utterance ‘albarca’ or ‘abarca’ (fig.3), which defines a similar shoe characteristic of the mountain regions of Spain that, although it is made of leather (sometimes also of wood), it is also ‘closed’ in other words it covers the foot completely. The term ‘albarca’ or ‘abarca’ is also used in Peru for relevant types of shoes, coexisting with the term ‘ojota’ (fig.4) that are flip-flop shoes of artisanal type. In fact, in the linguistic variants of Spanish in Latin America there is the term ‘patuco’ corresponding to our term ‘τερλίκι’ [terliki] or ‘πατίκι’ [patiki].

In this approach, the possibilities of interlingual translation are limited to: a) the transliteration of the utterance, b) the descriptive verbalization as ‘zueco de cuero con un pompón’ (sabot or clog with pompom), although the tsarouhi is made of leather, c) in a connotative translation based on the meanings of ‘tradition’, for example: ‘zapato típico’ (traditional shoe) and of ‘country’, for example: ‘ojota’ (flip-flop shoes of artisanal type), d) in the use of the Spanish term ‘albarca’ or ‘abarca’ as an influence of Peninsular Spanish to Peruvian Spanish, which shares the connotative meanings mentioned above (meanings that also accompany tsarouhi in the Greek language and culture) and could also - possibly - be made of leather. In my opinion, this last choice seems to be an appropriate choice for the translation of the Greek utterance.

The concept of intersemiotic translation between non-verbal semiotic systems could serve intercultural communication. In the following example, we see a photograph of the Mexican toy ‘balero’ (fig.5). If we wanted to exhibit this Mexican toy in a Greek museum of popular art or if we wanted to give it as a present to a Greek child, we should firstly explain what the particular object is or how it functions.

This process becomes easier due to the fact that this game is known in Greece -mostly as a traditional toy of an older period- as ‘βιλβοκέτο’ [vilvoketo], a term originated in the similar translation French toy ‘bilboquet’. As PROVÉNZO et al. (1989 [1979]: 195) mention: “the cup and ball’s origin is unclear, but we know that the toy was well known in India and Greece very early and had become very fashionable as a toy among adults and children in Italy and France by the late sixteenth century”. The main difference, of course, between the Greek and the Mexican toy lies in the fact that “in Mexico and in South America it is called ‘balero’ […], and there, the ball does not have a round shape, but it is drum-shaped”, as BRAMAN (2002: 107) states.

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12 Cup-and-ball (or ball in a cup) or ring and pin is a traditional children's toy. It is generally a wooden handle, to which a small ball is attached by a string, and which has one or two cups, or a spike, upon which the player tries to catch the ball. It is popular in Spanish-speaking countries, where it is called by a wide number of names (including boliche in Spain and balero in most of Latin America), and was historically popular in France as the bilboquet. A similar toy with three cups and a spike called kendama is very popular in Japan and has spread globally in popularity (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cup-and-ball).
An intersemiotic translation, through a similar toy distributed as an offer by the Kidder company to anyone who purchases a chocolate egg from this firm in Greece (fig.7), mostly today when this type of toy isn’t widely known, recalls the well-known statement of GREIMAS (1983: 119) that “interpretation is recognition and identification”. In this case, the Mexican semiosphere, which is tangent to the Spanish, also has a toy named ‘boliche’ (fig.6). The Alter becomes Ego through a semiosis facilitated by the function of the intersemiotic process. It also becomes quite clear that to be able to exhibit this toy in a museum, the accompanying verbal message, and the interlingual translation from Mexican Spanish to Greek relate directly to its intersemiotic translation, where the informational loss is smaller.

![Figure 5: Mexican ‘Balero’](image1)
![Figure 6: Spanish ‘boliche’](image2)
![Figure 7: Greek ‘βιλβοκέτο’ [vilvoketo]](image3)

If the intermediation of semiospheres in hetero-communication contributes to the transmission of the message, culture as a permanent process of intersemiotic translation (TOROP 2003: 280) also becomes characteristic of auto-communication. Thus, in 2010, after reading, as a participant, the program of a Congress in Finland, I realized, from the form (i.e. the ending –nen) of the names of the other participants and from the city they represented that everyone was Finnish except for one person who was from Venezuela. Once in the conference room, I encountered five light colored conferrers and one more person who was darker in color, translating that last one as the one from Venezuela, because according to my cultural knowledge, Northern-Europeans are light colored and Latin Americans dark colored. The visualization of the mental image in my mind as a product of auto-communication was intersemiotically translated through the visualization of the message.

Even though several translation scholars could not classify the above case as a translation phenomenon, the School of Cultural Semiotics signified a broadening of the concept of translation which responds to issues of cultural translation through an interesting and often challenging practice, for which intersemiotic translation plays an important role. This insight meets Lotman’s observation that “[…] the inner dialogue of the addressee is already connected with translation, whereby this translation is principally nearly impossible, In any case, we are dealing here with the type of translation Jakobson calls intersemiotic” (LOTMAN 2014: 30).

[A] Remarks

The utterance that seems to be untranslatable in the case of cultural communication could be translated including even more information not only through intersemiotic translation but also through interlingual. This conclusion confirms Lotman’s stance that “[…] the translation of the untranslatable may in turn become a carrier of the information of the highest value” (LOTMAN 2009 [1992]: 6). ANDREWS & MAKSIMOVA (2008: 265) believe that “[…] Lotman creates a relative category of untranslatability, where in the end, everything is potential translatable; however, extracting information and new meanings from these less accessible textual spaces increases the value of the content of the utterance”. In this direction

13 For ECO (1988: 255), “the fact that the signifier is frequently a mental image (a memory place can be either real or imaginary) does not change things. From Ockham to Peirce we have assumed that a mental icon or concept can be understood as a sign as well”.
it seems to contribute significantly to the equivalence that derives from the overlapping semiospheres.

In both cases of heterocommunication which were mentioned previously the main element of overlapping semiospheres is the concept of ‘similarity’. ‘Tsarouhi’ resembles ‘albarca’ and ‘balero’ resembles to ‘βιλβοκέτο’ [vilvoketo]. As Chesterman mentions:

*similarity assessment also comes into the activity of defining concepts, especially when we try to do this on an extensional basis. We examine various exemplars of the concept, and try to see what they have in common, what features they share – in other words, we try to pinpoint the similarities between them (some would say the essential similarities).* (CHESTERMAN 2007: 70)

As a consequence, intersemiotic translation is based on this concept since we are seeking the same message in a different sign system, what JAKOBSON (2004 [1959]: 139) names “[…] equivalent messages in two different codes”. To round off, as ECO (1994 [1990]: 178) mentions, “it is the user who decides the ‘description’, under which, according to a given practical purpose, certain characteristics are to be taken into account in determining whether two objects are ‘objectively’ similar and consequently interchangeable”.

[A] Conclusions

Lotman laid the foundations for the semiotic approach to translation with his provocative and progressive ideas when he mentioned that “an elementary act of thinking is translation” he also completed his thought saying that “elementary mechanism of translating is dialogue” (LOTMAN 1990: 43). Using Bakthin, we could suggest they meet on common ground in their relationship between translation proper and cultural dialogue. The aforementioned is also connected to Eco’s relationship between translation proper and cultural negotiation, since, for ECO (2003: 6), many concepts circulating in translation studies (such as adequacy, equivalence, faithfulness) could be considered from the point of view of negotiation.

I am strongly supporting Torop’s position that “the ontology of translation semiotics rests on the recognition that culture works in many respects as a translation mechanism, as mediation, and that mediation in culture involves both communication and autocommunication” (TOROP 2008: 257). Torop, subscribing to the Tartu-Moscow project for the Semiotics of Culture, discusses translation as the creation of a new language of mediation between cultures but also of languages.

Although the Tartu-Moscow School has formulated fascinating ideas and theories, it has remained on a theoretical level, whereas in Translation Studies we need a more applied analysis such as TOROP’s (2009) and SÖNESSON’s (2014) works. I also believe that what we need in Translation Studies is the interpretation of the basic terms which the Tartu-Moscow School uses and in which way this contributes to the Translation Studies.

In this article, I have attempted to demonstrate that the most important contribution of the Tartu-Moscow School is the identification of the concept of culture with the concept of translation, a correlation which broadens the use of the term ‘translation’. While this School provides an extremely interesting theoretical springboard for the semiotic approach of translation, the concept of culture itself can be used directly as a tool for this theory, through

14 An affinity with Jakobson’s typology and thought is discussed in Torop’s model of ‘total translation’ (SÜTISTE & TOROP 2007: 204). As a taxonomic model of the translation process it is based on “the general characteristics of text and communication and leads to the conviction that a description of the translation process is applicable to other types of text communication” (TOROP 2000: 72). For critical use of Sönesson’s model of translation as a double act of communication, a model that has not yet been fully explored, see YOKA & KOURDIS (2014).
the concept of ‘infinite semiosis’, which is a constant feature of the systems of anthroposemiosis.

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