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Translation in the South African popular media: A case study of YOU and Huisgenoot

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Conclusion

I thought about this misunderstanding again – of social contexts failing in translation – when a friend sent me an article from *The New York Times Magazine*. The article, on changes in New York's Chinatown, made passing reference to the inherent ambivalence of the Chinese language. Chinese people are so "discreet and modest," the article stated, that there aren't even words for "yes" and "no." That's not true, I thought [the author is able to make this statement as she is Chinese], although I could see why an outsider might think that. I continued reading. If one is Chinese, the article went on, "one compromises, one doesn't hazard a loss of face by an overemphatic response." My throat seized. Why do people keep saying these things? As though we were like those little dolls sold in Chinatown tourist shops, heads bobbing up and down in complacent agreement to anything said! ... Something enormous is always lost in translation ...

(Tan: 2003, 281)

As translators, we strive for the right balance of source culture and target culture influences in our work as the ideal translation is a text which preserves the source culture influences but it must also be readily understandable to the target audience. Unfortunately, in many cases, we are instructed to assimilate our translations into the domestic culture as the book/magazine/newspaper will not be sold if the target audience does not find the book/articles relevant and interesting, which happens in the case of *You* and *Huisgenoot*. Translators need to understand the mechanics of the popular) media as they need to be able to contextualise the translations that they do for this industry. Thus the media was discussed and as society is responsible for the specific format of the media, its relationship with society was discussed as well.

At the beginning of this report, I set out to find out what are the policies and processes of translation in *You* and *Huisgenoot* - what is translated, why is it translated, how is it translated and who translates it.

The following question was also addressed:

- What are the objectives of translation in *You* and *Huisgenoot*?

In answer to the questions "what is translated" and "why is it translated", material that is culturally relevant, and of interest, to the readers of *You* and *Huisgenoot* is translated in attempt to tailor the magazines' content and presentation to their specific target markets which means, as has been mentioned throughout this report that *You* and *Huisgenoot*, the goal of translation is *domestication*. Thus translator invisibility, which includes domestication and foreignisation, was discussed.

When *You* started, all material was generated in Afrikaans and it fell to the *You* staff – who were all originally employed as translators, in addition to their formal job titles – to translate the material. As previously mentioned, that balance has shifted and now *Huisgenoot* has to translate the bulk of material. The workload became too heavy for the staff at *Huisgenoot* to manage, thus a dedicated translator was employed. However, sometimes the volume of work exceeds the translator's capabilities and the translation team sometimes has to assist him. As has been mentioned, translation is guided by intuition rather than formal translator training or theory. Given this fact, ethics were discussed in terms of being 'rules' that guide translation at *Huisgenoot.* Certain translation theories were discussed as it was felt that they could aid translators working in the popular media. Translators are not required to have had any formal translation training. A good grasp of Afrikaans and English, and a thorough understanding of the magazine industry, are preferred skills. The translator is not given any formal brief; he is only told not to deviate from the facts, to keep to the length of the original copy and to make the translation sound appropriate in the target language.

In the introduction to this report, I also set out to find out whether the following affects the processes and policies of translation at *You* and *Huisgenoot*:

- The magazines' make-up
- The magazines' subject matter
- The magazines' readership

- The magazines' circulation
- Whether or not the translator is acknowledged for his/her work
- Specific criteria governing the selection of translators
- Who holds the copyright for translated articles
- Who accepts the translations
- Whether or not the translations undergo any type of change between the handing over of the final translation and publication in the magazine.

Instead of the above-questions affecting translation processes and policies, translation policies and processes are adapted to the different aspects of *You* and *Huisgenoot* so that translation serves to aid the magazines in achieving their objectives. *You* and *Huisgenoot* have devised a perfect formula for a family magazine, which appeals to many South African readers, thus the process of translation is made as discrete as possible so that the make-up of the magazines and their subject matter remain constant. *You* and *Huisgenoot*'s significant circulation indicates that the 'recipe' for these magazines works. Thus the fact that translation has occurred must not be obvious as the readers of *You* and *Huisgenoot* must think that the subject matter has been generated in either English or Afrikaans because if translation is obvious, the formula that has made *You* and *Huisgenoot* such a success, may be disturbed. The processes and policies of translation at *You* and *Huisgenoot* are not affected by the person who accepts translations and the fact that she 'tweaks' the translations to make them more appropriate to the target audience. Rather, this alteration of translations forms part of the translation policies and processes.

At *You* and *Huisgenoot*, translation is seen as a [final] step in the process of publishing these magazines. The fact that people are employed for other positions and have to do translation as well (as in the case of *You*), and they do not need any formal translation qualifications, suggests that translation is not seen as an essential practice and that any person who has a good command of English and Afrikaans can translate. It is more important that s/he be proficient in a magazine-related profession, such as editing.

Translation in the media is quite an unexplored subject and to date, translation in the global news has been the only area of translation in the media that has been explored. Investigations into translation in the printed popular media are non-existent and I feel that this is a rich area for further investigation as it will not only provide further material on translation but it will also provide information on other areas of study, as I attempted to indicate in this research report.