Actor-Network Theory in Intercultural Communication: Translation through the Prism of Innovation, Technology, Networks and Semiotics

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to discuss the place of the Actor-Network Theory in intercultural communication. To narrow the scope of the research, the author concentrates on the role of participants in one type of intercultural exchange, namely in translation. Thus, such issues as translator(s), translation, languages, texts and units are given a detailed study in this article. An attempt will be made to show how ANT is useful in this area of cross-cultural communication. Hence, those taking part in the translation process, both human and nonhuman entities, are treated as an ecosystem, being a place for technological innovation.

Keywords: Actor-Network Theory, Intercultural Communication, Translation

INTRODUCTION

As some may say, nowadays we are living in a global village. People work far away from their homelands, do business with partners living on other continents and spend their free time in distant resorts. Thus, in professional and private life we meet people coming from different cultures. That is why we are both subjects and objects of intercultural communication since we participate, passively and actively, in cross-cultural encounters. We communicate even when we do not speak. A person who sits huddled with arms folded and head down communicates that he is trying to avoid communication (Novinger, 2001, p.4). That is why, whether we want it or not, we are taking part in this process.

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Intercultural communication involves the interaction of people speaking different languages. Thus, translation and interpretation constitute a crucial element of this process. In this article, the term ‘translation’ is used to denote all the activities necessary to provide people with a message in their or other languages that are known to them.

We should bear in mind that translation involves not only people. Even those not aware of the nuances of every translation process know that translators do not work in isolation, and both the process and the product, e.g. a text, as well as the translators themselves, are influenced by other elements constituting any translation network. To discuss this feature in depth, the notion of an ecosystem will be adopted.

**ECOSYSTEM**

The aim of this part of the article is to employ the issue of an ecosystem and try to show its possible applications in the field of translation. The perspective selected for this research will be mainly of a semiotic character, which stresses the role of ANT in approaching the translation process. The issues of ecosystems, network and semiotics are interrelated and of interest to scholars representing each of the domains mentioned. The approach adopted by the author of this article seems to be valid for other reasons as well. Nowadays we live in liquid times (Bauman 2004), where borders are not fixed. The same attitude is stressed in synechism, which opts for continuities and a lack of boundaries, a system where the division between nature and culture is not stable (Nöth, 2007, p. 13). Thus, this ecosystemic point of view stresses the relations rather than separate entities. Another feature is exemplified by Pihlström (2007), who states that, according to the theory presented by Peirce, synechism is against sharp discontinuities between the living and non-living (p. 744). This is also a key feature of the Actor-Network Theory, which places emphasis on the equal treatment of human and non human entities (Burton and Hamilton, 2005, p. 29; Tatnall and Davey, 2005, pp. 772-773; Val Dusek, 2006, p. 207). As Nöth (2007) notes, in the past machines were treated as products, whereas nowadays they are possible agents in or even producers of culture, namely in the so-called posthuman culture (p. 12). We should also state that in some approaches, e.g. the communicative ecosystem (Mackin 1997), the role of weaker links and their importance for the systemic strength is underlined. Mackin (1997) states that when marginalized voices find that they are being incorporated into communal knowledge and so influencing decisions, their ties to the communities will be strengthened (p. 131). This feature, however, is not discussed due to the limitations of this article.
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