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Mistranslation in Cross Cultural Communication: A Discourse Analysis on Former President Bush's Speech in 2001

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***Abstract*—**The differences in languages play a big role in cross-cultural communication. If meanings are not translated accurately, the risk can be crucial not only on an interpersonal level, but also on the international and political levels. The use of metaphorical language by politicians can cause great confusion, often leading to statements being misconstrued. In these situations, it is the translators who struggle to put forward the intended meaning with clarity and this makes translation an important field to study and analyze when it comes to cross-cultural communication. Owing to the growing importance of language and the power of translation in politics, this research analyzes part of President Bush's speech in 2001 in which he used the word "Crusade" which caused his statement to be misconstrued. The research uses a discourse analysis of cross-cultural communication literature which provides answers supported by historical, linguistic, and communicative perspectives. The first finding indicates that the word 'crusade' carries different meaning and significance in the narratives of the Western world when compared to the Middle East. The second one is that, linguistically, maintaining cultural meanings through translation is quite difficult and challenging. Third, when it comes to the cross-cultural communication perspective, the common and frequent usage of literal translation is a sign of poor strategies being followed in translation training. Based on the example of Bush's speech, this paper hopes to highlight the weak practices in translation in cross-cultural communication which are still commonly used across the world. Translation studies have to take issues such as this seriously and attempt to find a solution. In every language, there are words and phrases that have cultural, historical and social meanings that are woven into the language. Literal translation is not the solution for this problem because that strategy is unable to convey these meanings in the target language.

***Keywords*—**Crusade, metaphor, mistranslation, war in terror.

I. Introduction

LANGUAGE plays a very significant role in every sphere of administration. In politics, however, language is not only significant, but it is one of the primary keys that politicians rely on to accomplish their objectives. Reference [1] argues that "…in the western tradition of political thought, there is a close interdependence between language and politics. Language is used to formulate policies (including language policies), create alliance, shape and disseminate values that define political associations, establish legal systems, and identify forms of government" (p.2). Language therefore is used as a factor for politicians to persuade and influence people in order to accomplish their goals.

In today's globalized world, using metaphorical language exists in many forms of discourse, including the political one. According to [2], metaphor is "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them." Therefore, metaphorical language is figurative. The world at large is connected more than ever before through media outlets. Hence whatever politicians say in their speeches can be translated and shown throughout the world. However, the use of metaphorical language by politicians can cause great misinterpretations as metaphorical words and language are constructed socio-culturally in every culture. In the realm of international relations, misunderstandings of political messages can have big impact on the relationships between nations [3].

During political engagement in which two different cultures are involved, language often becomes an issue or perhaps a complex dilemma due to the fact that people from two different cultures may have different understanding and meaning of specific words. The role that media has in such political engagement is essential because it has a big influence on the public opinion of each culture in any political dispute [4]. Obviously, the primary factor that makes language problematic in political engagement is that it involves two different cultures and languages that are used by both sides to describe their feeling and intention on the issue.

The importance of political discourse in the field of international relations has led to prevalent attentiveness to translation studies [3]. As the world is becoming more connected, cultures are meeting each other, and ideologies are intermingled. The field of translation had to face new patterns and behaviors, which have caused reform in the translation field [5]. Yet, translators face a lot of challengers in these situations. Reference [1] acknowledges that in recent times, translation of political discourse has been increased, especially in the last two decades. However, involving translation in cross-cultural political spectrum can potentially cause more complication about the issue than it really is [4]. As many people would generally know, translating is the process of making equivalent correspondence between the source language and the target language based on all linguistic roles. This process is often difficult due to several reasons such as differences in cultural meaning of words or phrases, linguistic incompetency and lack of cross-cultural knowledge. The fact that translation involves two different languages makes having

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deep knowledge in intercultural communication and linguistics very important for translators. Therefore, studying cross-cultural communication is extremely important in the translation field [6].

In his article concerning the ethical task of the translator in the geo-political arena, [7] asserts: "translators are pivotal players in global events, operating at the grinding edge of their associated conflicts and controversial politics. Though largely vulnerable to exercises of power outside of their control, translators can come to represent all things to people in conflict situations, embodiment of both the heroes and the villains of the international political stage" (p.212).

Due to the importance of the role of language and the power of translation in cross-cultural politics, this paper analyzes part of President Bush's speech in 2001 when he declared a global war on terrorism. The part of his speech caused an outrage in the Arab world due to mistranslation of his speech. This paper looks at and analyzes the reasons behind that mistranslation and misunderstanding that occurred because of that speech. This paper also attempts to answer the question of why Bush's message was mistranslated. This paper will answer that question through historical, linguistic, and communicative perspectives and will shed light on the problems of translation in cross-cultural messages.

II. Background

About 5 days after the attack of 9/11 when former president Bush's administration decided to launch a war on global terrorism, President Bush delivered a speech in the White House regarding the war. When answering questions from the audience, specifically a question regarding the domestic surveillance to deter terrorism inside the United States, Bush's stated that: "We need to go back to work tomorrow and we will. But we need to be alert to the fact that these evil-doers still exist. We haven't seen this kind of barbarism in a long period of time. No one could have conceivably imagined suicide bombers burrowing into our society and then emerging all in the same day to fly their aircraft - fly U.S. aircraft into buildings full of innocent people - and show no remorse. This is a new kind of -- a new kind of evil. And we understand. And the American people are beginning to understand. This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while. And the American people must be patient. I'm going to be patient." [8]

Bush's usage of the word "crusade" in that speech has been widely criticized, especially in the Middle East due to the fact that the word "crusade" echoes historical and religious wars that is negatively viewed in that region. Reference [9] indicated that the evident problem in the usage of the word "crusade" is that it is linked directly with historical events also known as "The Crusades" and this may lead to many political, linguistic, and religious misinterpretations. However, when Bush used the word "crusade" he did not mean it in the religious sense. The reason for that is because the Bush's administration was committed to spread democracy throughout the world [10]. Therefore, this fact is antithetical to the claim that the use of the word "crusade" by Bush has religious connotation. In other words, he used the word to mean that the battle against global terrorism is going to be long, and the United States is committed to fight terrorism as long as it takes and will spread democracy and liberty to the world. Therefore, Bush used the word "crusade" in its modern meaning which is a long lasting war and not in its religious meaning [9].

Reference [10] articulated that the Bush administration had an objective to spread democracy globally. In Bush's second inaugural address, he stated that "the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world" (p.12). Therefore, it is obvious that Bush's intention when he used the word crusade meant he was intended to fight a long war to spread democracy. He used that word as if he wanted to launch a crusade for democracy, which has nothing to do with religion.

Several political scholars have indicated that Bush's usage of the word crusade was merely to describe his political ambition. Andrew [9] labels Bush doctrine as a "crusading spirited doctrine" in which he planned to spend a long-term war to spread democracy and liberate the world from tyranny and terrorism. Reference [9] further points out that it is clear that the Bush doctrine did not intend to call the war on terrorism as a crusade based on the historical sense of the word. A historical definition of "crusade" according to [9] is: a crusade was a warrior pilgrimage inspired by the Pope's call for Christians to recover Christian territory in the Middle East. The definition clearly has nothing to do with Bush's intention when he made his comment about the war on terrorism. In other words, [9] claims that "The Bush Doctrine and the American foreign policy is not motivated by religious eschatology or by the demand for penance and redemption" (p.166).

III. Historical Perspective

Historically, the Crusade is an event in which the Western and Eastern worlds were in a fierce confrontation and long battles that caused big loss of human lives. In the Western world, the images and narratives of the Crusade were mainly described by Western chronicles. On the other hand, the Eastern images and narratives of the same event are not quite known in the Western world [11]

Reference [11] asserts that "Medieval chronicles are not neutral texts. They might even be considered medieval means of "propaganda", as they represent the interests of a certain group, are written for a certain ruler, and glorify or find excuse for one particular side. These texts are meant to produce and effect. An attitude of criticism towards one's own side is quite rare in chronicles. Massacres are excused by the fact that the Other is not seen as being human" (p.145). Reference [11] further points out that medieval recounts of historical events tend to favor one side over the other in an attempt to represent a certain group as the good side and the other group as the bad side.

In the Middle East, the event of the Crusade has always meant in history that it was an invasion of vicious forces that

come from the Western world to conquer the Middle East. The term has always been deemed negatively as a wicked aggression [11]. Reference [11] further asserts that "The passage of the crusaders in the Holy Land imprinted certain stereotypes in our culture that can still be drawn upon today" [11].

The word crusade is viewed to have involved religion in the conflict that Bush was talking about. Even though president Bush did not intend to mean what the word literally meant when it was translated into Arabic, the word "Crusade" insinuated negative historical and religious meanings in his speech to the audience in the Arab world. Reference [7] emphasized "One of the characteristics of the "war in terror" has been the conflation of politics and religion within the political field" (p.220).

The conflation of religion in the war in terror was not intended though, but it was initiated by the mistranslation of the word "Crusade" in Bush's speech. Reference [4] stated "…translation, at least sometimes, is efficient in creating feeling or misconceptions" (p.81). The mistranslation of the word crusade from English to Arabic made a big misconception of Bush's intention in his speech and resulted in creating a detestable feeling toward his message. Even though the truth is that the war on terror was not motivated religiously. Reference [11] asserts that "The September 11 terrorist attack and the events that followed do not qualify as a religious war. The "war against terror" is not a religious war" (p.149).

IV. Linguistic Perspective

Many people would ask that why the word crusade was mistranslated. This question is legitimate and the answer to it is that since Bush did not use the word Crusade in its literal meaning, he used it figuratively. Interpreting figurative language requires sufficient knowledge in the social and cultural aspects of it. This type of language is usually shared by members of a specific regional cultural group. With every society, figurative language develops the meaning within the boundary of that particular society. Therefore, people from outside that group of society may not understand the implicit or the social and cultural meaning that are associated with figurative words and phrases [3].

Reference [3] further asserts that "…since language is socio-culturally and politically situated, the use and translation of figurative language in international political discourse may lead to considerable risks or produce substantial rewards, depending on the context of translation. In today's increasingly globalised and mediatised world where the destinies of the nations are intertwined and repeatedly woven together by means of this international political discourse, it is obvious that extreme caution needs to be exercised when translating and interpreting figurative language from one language to another" (p.428-429).

Translation practice has ethical behavior, because it involves social and political responsibilities. It is important to understand that translation does not produce cross-cultural messages based on linguistic aspects. Also, it also incorporates historical, ideological, and cultural factors [5]. Reference [5] further admits that "in such a context of radical transformations in global exchange processes, not only the translator is confronted with serious challenges, but also traditional notion of translation are no longer sufficient to cover the whole range of activities necessary when members of multilingual cultures transcend geographical, ethnic, linguistic, political and national borders" (p.21).

Due to the fact that what people say and communicate to others is determined based on different situations, translators should bear in mind that cultural meaning is involved in how people deal with some situations as well as how they describe it in their language. This is especially true when they use metaphorical words to describe specific situations. Therefore translators should analyze the situation before translating what a speaker say literally word by word [12].

Translating metaphors is one of the most challenging tasks for translators. Reference [6] emphasized that "Translating the SL metaphorical expressions into the TL tends to pose processing difficulties for foreign language learners, interpreters and translators as well". The "SL" represents the source language and the "TL" represents the target language. Much of the research on translation studies has indicated that many translators poorly translate metaphors from other languages [12]. Reference [12] suggests that translators should use a cognitive view when translating metaphors. The reason for that is because the cognitive approach in translation provides more insights and reasoning when choosing the right expression or word in another language to translate any given metaphor.

Reference [5] acknowledges an important point in regard to translation. He argues that translation cannot be separated from social contexts. Furthermore, the act of translating is done through people who must share bounds to a specific social group. Therefore, translation is inescapably associated to social institution, which has a big impact on the production of translation. Reference [13] further acknowledges that language contain cultural meanings that are blended into the language. Transmitting the cultural meanings by translation is quite difficult and risky. The reason for that, according to [13], is because culture contains a composite set of social, historical, and religious traditions.

V. Communication Perspective

Reference [14] provides a very useful analysis on speech acts. He divides utterances into three categories or forces. These categories are: locution, illocution, and perlocution. The locution force is the meaning of the content that is uttered or used by the speaker in his/her speech. The illocution force, on the other hand, is the intention of the speaker through using the words or phrases he/she uses in the speech. The third force is the perlocution, which is the consequence or result of uttering the words in the speech.

Clearly, [14] helps to analyze the error when translating Bush's speech in 2001, which due to its mistranslation, made the political situation between the United States and the Arab world at that time from bad to worse. When the news media in

the Arab world translated the word "Crusade" in the speech, they only looked at the locutionary force and ignored the illocution force. Ignoring the illicoution force of the utterance caused a big mistake in translation. By only focusing on the locutionary force, translators convey a meaning that is different from what the speaker intends. Through analyzing the translation of the word crusade in president Bush's speech, it is clear that the Arab translators ignored the illicutionary force and carried only the locutionry force of utterance. Furthermore, the case of Bush's usage of the word crusade revealed an important point in translation, which is the incompetence of the literal translation strategy. Literal translation does not transmit socio-cultural meanings in many words and phrases. Thus, literal translation should not be done all the times. Reference [13] pointed out that "Translation involves not only the transfer of "meaning" contained in one set of language signs into another set of language signs through competent use of dictionary and grammar, but also a whole set of extra linguistic criteria. Cultural transfer may be viewed as counterposed to what can be called "grammatical" translation which is bound to the written text on the page. Culture awareness is one key element that the translator must always keep in mind when performing any type of translation" (p.126).

Reference [15] indicated that resorting to literal translation reflects the linguistic incompetency of the translator. It also reflects the failure of the translator to deal with some words and phrases in the source language. Reference [15] further asserts that "…translator training should focus on improving the lexical competence of translators, particularly in the areas related to idioms and, by the same token, the more complex and creative aspects of the English language like multi-word units and metaphors" (p.128).

Reference [6] assumed that literal translation of metaphorical expressions in the source language happens because of two main reasons. One is the inability to recognize the difference between metaphorical and other expressions in the source language. The other reason is the inability to find an equivalent meaning for the metaphorical expressions. Based on their study, [6] recommended that translation students should learn how to recognize the metaphorical expressions in the source language and know how to deal with them in any given situation.

The use of literal translation is a sign of poor strategies in translation training. Focusing only on literal translation to translate from another language will more likely produce translated texts that are not contextually correct. In other words, relying on literal translation often produce incorrect and poor translation, despite the fact that literal translation is, unfortunately, a common strategy used frequently in translation [16].

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