

Call for papers

The Challenges and Consequences of Cultural Misunderstanding: Linguistic, Legal and Translational Perspectives

14th-16th of March 2024

Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France

in cooperation with the University of Applied Sciences (Zwickau) and the
University of Grenoble

This conference aims at shedding new light on the challenges and consequences of cultural misunderstanding. Following an interdisciplinary approach, the theme of the conference will be examined from a linguistic, legal and translational perspective. The intention of the event is to establish a link between theory and praxis. Presentations on different theories and disciplinary approaches are encouraged as well as accounts from the professional life of translators, lawyers and linguists. In the context of this event, we define intercultural misunderstandings both as misunderstandings between cultures of different countries, but also as misunderstandings within the same country due to cultural, regional, social or ethnic differences.

The consequences of cultural misunderstandings in the field of translation are diverse. In the domain of international communication, translators play a key role as cultural mediators. Faithfully conveying the original message of the speaker is a considerable challenge, as wrong translations can lead to misunderstandings, cultural clashes and even political conflicts on an international level. In order to be able to produce a faithful translation of the original, the translator must have an in-depth knowledge of the source culture. In the field of literary translation, cultural misunderstandings can lead to the distortion of the source text or can convey false images of a certain culture or country. However, cultural misunderstandings can also be fruitful and have a creative potential. In this context, papers may examine not only literary works but also theoretical or philosophical texts, which have received a different reception in translation than in their original language. Cultural misunderstandings can also be observed in the domain of audio-visual translation and the translation of musical works.

In the field of linguistics, misunderstandings often go hand in hand with the notion of error and diverge from the norm. Misunderstanding can generate errors (voluntary and involuntary) at different levels of the language system: phonetic and phonological, morphological, lexical, textual-discursive and pragmatic. These errors are often caused by the influence of the mother tongue on a foreign language, or even the "negative" transfer of structures. They can also be the result of diatopic, diastratic and diaphasic varieties of a language. Linguistic misunderstandings can also have a societal impact, as violations of the norm can lead to sanctions. In this context, the erroneous use of cultural concepts related to linguistic entities can generate the disruption of communication. This problem affects to a high degree texts with an appellative or persuasive orientation, as is the case in marketing communication: if the enunciator of a text does not take into account the functional-pragmatic side of the message, the communicative effect may be erroneous.

In the field of law, legal translation is a particular challenge as the cultural references of each legal system are often not equivalent. Structural idiosyncrasies of legal systems are often the result of national history and are reflected in terminology, syntax and the organisation of thought. Legal texts and their interpretation by court often lead to decisions that can be understood differently from one culture to another. For this reason, the translator cannot simply transfer a text or legal message from one language to the other. At a time when all Western societies are confronted with socio-cultural plurality, business globalisation and the corresponding increase in international agreements, but also when normative systems are increasingly interacting, legal translation has become a real challenge, both in terms of content and form. Like a tightrope walker, the translator must find the balance between strict respect for the meaning of a legal rule and its understanding by the person for whom it is intended.

Possible topics might include:

In the field of translation studies:

- literary translation (poetry, prose, theatre, graphic novels)
- translation of musical works
- translation/transposition (films, theatre works, series, etc.)
- audio-visual translation
- translation and interpreting in a migratory context
- translation in a social context
- translation of political and scientific speeches
- legal translation
- interpreting and translation in a legal context (court, prison, etc.)

In the field of linguistics:

- phonetic and phonological idiosyncrasies between L1 and L2, L1 and L3, etc. or between the standard language and a diatopic, dialectal or diastratic variety
- morphological and lexical particularities between L1 and L2, L1 and L3, etc. or between the standard language and a diatopic, dialectal or diastratic variety
- the structure of different types of text (websites, administrative texts, legal and medical texts ...) in different languages and cultures
- differences in discourse (political, legal, religious, media, scientific, etc.)
- detailed analyses of selected varieties such as, for example, youth language, different specialised languages, Creole languages, etc.

In the field of law:

- legal uniformity and multiculturalism (or even communitarianism)
- the need for the translator to have legal knowledge of both systems
- linguist-lawyer or lawyer-linguist?
- the legal sanctions for translation errors (including article 434-18 of the French Penal Code)
- translation in criminal law and international judicial cooperation
- the search for a "reasonable accommodation" in legal translation (this is the term used by the Canadian justice system to explain that the most accurate meaning must be found)
- the inadequacy and even impossibility of literal translation.

Please submit your proposal of approximately 200 words with a short bio by the 15th of May 2023 in a Word file with your name as the title. Papers will be 20 minutes in length, and the languages of the abstracts and papers will be English, French or German.

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