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It is an *encounter* with diversity which favours a critical reflexivity on what we take-for-granted of both emic and etic worldviews. It is *practice* that involves the constant exercise of moving in a space in-between. It represents the *opportunity* to engage in a double perspective. It is an *experience* which make us observe, challenge, redefine and move through borders. It is an *occasion* to look at our knowledge, assumptions and representations from a different point of view. Well, no, it is not Intercultural Dialogue. It is Translation.

Translation shares indeed many characteristics with the intercultural perspective. Though translation necessarily requires the theoretical knowledge of different languages, it is mainly a practice and an experience. Translation thus combines cognition with exercise. after all, physical activity and spatial feature characterize it from its own etymological roots. The word 'translation' comes from the Latin 'trans' + 'ducere', where 'trans' means 'across', 'beyond', 'through', and 'ducere' is a verb meaning 'to lead', so that the literal meaning of translation refers to the actions of 'leading from one place to another', of 'going through/across', and of 'moving beyond a place to reach another'.

Yet, if cognition and exercise necessarily characterize translation, they are not sufficient conditions for it to substantiate and display. In his seminal book on translation, *Dire quasi la stessa cosa. Esperienze di traduzione* [Saying almost the same thing. Experiences in Translation], Umberto Eco offers several factual, witty, humorous and sometimes paradoxical examples of all the problems, but also the opportunities, offered by the practice of translation. Eco's volume originated from personal and professional experiences on and with translation which he was later asked to present in a series of conferences and, which, in turn, were collected in this text. The experiential element then characterises the volume, but Eco does not miss the opportunity to reflect theoretically on the semantic units of 'dire' [saying] and 'cosa' [thing]. Yet, the key word there is 'quasi' [almost], that is the acceptance of the condition of being in-between two words, two languages, two cultures. Moving from one language to another always means, in Eco's word, 'negoziazione' [negotiation], that is an activity in which usually two parties are ready to give up something in order to gain something else with the intent of being mutually satisfied. In translation, though, the practice of negotiation always implies the constant comparison between the structures of the different languages, a process through which each language can become its own meta-language.

Translation, then, encompasses several elements: theoretical knowledge, exercise, motion, negotiation, and reflexivity. And a further element too: the acknowledgment of the mutual influence of language and culture in shaping the link and the word/world. Anthropologists know it pretty well, as epitomized by (the now almost anecdotal) Sapir & Whorf's example of Inuit snow-terms, or Claude Lévi-Strauss' assertion that the French word '*fromage*' ascribes to a different worldview than the English word 'cheese'.

So, it is evident that translation is not so much *about* words, but, rather, it necessarily involves a reflexivity on *how* words shape our meanings, our cultural conceptualizations, our emotions. Therefore, reflecting on *other* words is a task which engages us to reflect on *our own* words: unveiling how much is cultural and situated in the folds of what we consider 'natural' and taken-for-granted in our language, translation invites us to explore the differences not only between languages, but within language too. Encountering the Other entails a reconsideration of the Familiar, so that translation implies the beneficial exercise of discovering *l'étranger qui nous habite* (Kristeva 1988), as well as the acknowledgment that foreignness and exile do not refer only to migrants, but are rather the archetypical condition of contemporary lives (Hoffman 1998).

It is then indeed a most suitable intercultural practice that the Center for Intercultural Dialogue has bravely launched from its pages. The translation of the *Key Concepts* into different languages is not only a political statement encouraging a reconsideration of the conventional use of English as the one-and-only language of academia and research, but it also elicits the profitable activity of the relativization and the decentralization of one's own language and culture. A multilingual website is then very fit for the purposes of Intercultural Dialogue, as it does not involve the simple multiplication of languages, but it invites us to a critical reflexivity on how languages work, from within and in-between, and how they shape (and are shaped by) our cultural conceptualizations.

References:

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