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**THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN  
LATIN AMERICAN INTEGRATION:  
OVERCOMING THE CULTURAL  
DIVIDE TO ACHIEVE PROSPERITY**

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# **The Role of Translation in Latin American Integration: overcoming the cultural divide to achieve prosperity**

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<p><b><i>The Role of Translation in Latin American Integration: overcoming the cultural divide to achieve prosperity</i></b></p>
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The ideas discussed in this paper explore the important role as agents of social change that translators are called upon to play in this new century.

**1-Translation as an agent of cultural development**, since effective translation bridges the gap between cultures, not merely words.

**2- Translation as a promoter of economic growth**, given the boom in international trade and the dramatic rise in the demand for translation.

**3- The role of higher education institutions** as harbingers of change and generators of integration through innovative translation programmes.

These issues will be analysed in the context of Mercosur countries, with a special emphasis on Brazil and Argentina.

## **INTRODUCTION**

- **Mercosur: a space for interaction, a space for integration**

**A common cultural identity** is a must for a group of independent states seeking integration in order to construct and sustain regional trade agreements. Historically, no such identity existed for Latin America (LA) outside the discourse of American foreign policy. The 'Monroe Doctrine' (1823) promoted the creation of a Pan-American Alliance that would empower Latin American countries in case Spain decided to re-conquer its former colonies. But this doctrine was mainly ignored until 1904, when President Theodore Roosevelt reformed it to include US interference in the internal affairs of Latin American nations under certain circumstances. It was once again forgotten for two decades until President F. D Roosevelt in the 30's promoted the creation of the Organization of the American States (OAS) and launched a programme of cultural integration.

Even Simon Bolivar's vision of integration, described in his Letter from Jamaica, referred to a '**Hispanic**' America rather than to a '**Latin**' America, a sectarianism that was re-imprinted many times over in history. Only towards the end of the 20th century was the gulf between Hispanic and Portuguese Latin America narrowed sufficiently to allow a cultural identity to emerge. This was largely due to the all-round picture of Latin America created to facilitate global market liberalisation. Although 'Latin America' literally refers to the American nations that speak Latin-derived, Romance languages, after globalisation the term became consolidated to denote one of three regional emerging markets (Eastern Europe and Asia - excluding Japan).

In the light of this historical background, one of the most significant transformations in Latin America has been the launching of MERCOSUR (Mercado Común del Sur), a regional integration initiative that includes Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay as current members, with negotiations towards including also Chile and Bolivia. A treaty was signed by the four countries in March 1991, although Brazil and Argentina had already engaged in a bilateral program of integration and co-operation since 1985.

The fact that there is such a significant disparity in the sizes of the Mercosur economies means that Argentina and Brazil will continue to dominate Mercosur's policy agenda, and such dominance is liable to lead to periodic disagreements with the smaller countries.

Mercosur is much more than a commercial or investment venture. It is a historical, cultural and political phenomenon, with vast ramifications in the Latin American and international scene

However, as the majority of the regional integration projects, Mercosur started as an economic process, based on political decisions on the part of governments and powerful economic agents. Therefore, inter-governmental agreements about economic and commercial norms have advanced the furthest, at times facing opposition from particular interest groups. Other issues may be more difficult. The discussions about educational credentials, by contrast, have been very hard and protracted, especially when the issue is the validity of professional degrees. And issues of residency, migration and work permits have not yet been negotiated. In this political and governmental arena, the economic and commercial levels of integration overshadow cultural factors and traditions.

Our contemporary societies would be unthinkable without translation's contribution to encourage reciprocal understanding of different cultures. Two languages - Portuguese and Spanish, alike but different, so close and so distant in predominantly Spanish-

speaking Latin America - have customarily separated Argentina and Brazil mainly because of their apparent superficial similarities and their profound complex divergences.

With only two official languages to contend with, Mercosur's linguistic universe appears, at first sight, to be relatively simple, especially if compared with the European Union and its eleven official languages.

When Mercosur was established, linguistic equality among its member states was seen as an instrument to achieve integration: all legislation would need to be translated into the two official languages, apart from reports, proposals, treaties, not to mention the need for live interpreting of meetings. However, today no Mercosur institution has its own internal translation department and all translation work is outsourced.

To reach full potential Spanish and Portuguese – speaking countries have the duty to integrate culturally to advance economically. Translation professionals can play an active and creative role in this crucial **linguistic integration**. With their knowledge and training, translators can act as bonding agents to assist in the adjustments vital to ensure Mercosur's survival and definitive resurgence.

- **How to develop Mercosur's Social capital**

The first years of Mercosur have not being devoid of problems and have constituted a painful learning curve. One of the major difficulties has been the cultural divide formed by the Portuguese and Hispanic sectors.

Mercosur countries still lack what in the language of economics would be called a SOCIAL CAPITAL: i.e. using a World Bank definition, the norms and social relationships embedded in social structures that enable people to coordinate action to achieve desired goals, features such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for **mutual** benefit.

It is mainly in this sense that translators must be cultural and linguistic agents of change in order to help Latin America achieve prosperity. Taking into account that effective translation bridges the gap between cultures, not merely words, translators' contribution to integration should focus on the development of Mercosur's social capital.

The three missing links for Mercosur success concern social capital and since translators are trained to examine and understand the processes of dialogue and integration at the level of societies and cultures, they can help by:

**1. Building relationships and trust:**

Reducing and eventually eliminating the negativity that initially governs the interactions among people from different countries, speaking different languages, and gradually replacing it with trust and commitment to shared interests.

**2. Overcoming cultural differences:**

Recognizing the differences in values, habits of thought, and behaviour patterns that people bring from their national cultures; learning to use those differences to leverage strength from diversity.

### 3. Communicating over distances:

Developing ways of using e-communication for optimal effectiveness.

#### 1- Translation as an agent of cultural development

##### • **Translators as Culture Experts**

Goehing (1978) defines “culture” as the set of norms, factors and conventions that govern the behaviour of the members of any society. To be culturally competent involves the knowledge of these factors and the ability to interpret them correctly.

Students taking Translation Courses should develop this **competence** ; they should be aware of their own culture and the specific mechanisms that rule it and, at the same time, learn to appraise correctly the cultural phenomena of other cultures.

Four main aspects should be especially considered when developing this objective:

1- It is convenient to relate language and culture, dealing with both jointly since the analysis of any given language will foster reflections on the cultural contents it expresses.

2- It is advisable to deal with language and culture contrastingly, since comparisons are fundamental. The “other” is basically understood in the terms of one’s own system and in one’s way of thinking.

3- It is important not only to know and interpret correctly the cultural marks of the two cultures in contrast, but also to investigate and identify the preconceptions and stereotypes that both communities hold about each other. Eg. *What do Anglo- Saxons imply by being “Latin”?*. Would an Argentine readily identify with this stereotype?

4- It is recommended to deal with cultural subjects such as History, Politics, Economics without losing trace of the final objective :

“*Why does a translator need all this information?*” It is taken for granted that a translator must have deep knowledge of these subjects but mainly, he should be able to interpret these data taking account of their reception in the target language and culture.

The translation professional should also be able to anticipate the reader’s reaction and his knowledge of these fields. Thus, a competent translator will look at and unveil the patterns in which social dialogue and interaction evolve.

It is in this context that translators should be “**culture experts**” if by “culture”, we understand the collective constructions of codes and systems of social representations that permeate economic, social and political activities, a meaning that is present, though invisible, in the process of integration and dialogue. It must be remembered that the road to regional integration in MERCOSUR is just opening up and tremendous creative potential can emerge in the process of integration.

#### 2- Translation as a promoter of economic growth

## **STRATEGIC NATURE OF TRANSLATION**

Translation constitutes a key element in economic development and plays a vital role in exports and imports, labour training and investment. Translation enables access to capital markets, technology transfer and trade globalisation, since it allows the communication of new concepts, knowledge and experiences. Translation makes possible the harmonization of technical and commercial norms, facilitating international trade and stimulating production.

The transformations in the language industry following this groundswell of globalized trade are nothing short of revolutionary. In under 10 years, the translation business has developed into a global business.

A 1996 ATA (American Translation Association) Translation Market Study showed that the translation services market was valued at over u\$s 30 billion annually and would grow at 15-18 percent per year.

Business companies are beginning to understand the complexity and commitment behind going global. The Web is only accelerating this trend.

Even though billions of dollars are spent on translation each year, this is just a small portion of the value of the actual products sold. But companies should realize that poor translation means lost revenue due to lower –acceptance in foreign countries. Inefficient translation slows down marketing and distribution and may even cause product recall.

Since crossing cultures and languages is no easy task and translation fiascos don't come cheap, **translation quality** features high in international advertising and global branding. Let's consider Chevy's decision to market a car called NOVA in Latin America, where "No Va " means "doesn't run / work" in colloquial Spanish.

Smart companies understand that translation is a strategic imperative, given that the success of their core products depends on translation quality. It should be borne in mind that according to Veja, the Brazilian current affairs magazine in 1999, there were 458 Brazilian companies in Argentina while the latter had 322 companies in Brazil.

### **Cross Cultural Adaptation**

As I have said before, effective translation bridges the gap between cultures, not merely words. Therefore, the importance of understanding current marketing idioms in a given culture and applying them correctly cannot be overstressed.

The most effective way to market a product successfully is to make it look and feel like a native product in the target country, and not merely translating the words of its documentation. As Robert Sprung points out, when Time magazine was first published in a foreign language, the key to its success was that the Latin American issue did not merely duplicate its English version, but contents were tailored specifically to the region. It was highly challenging to recreate the voice and style of a text for a different culture: the project required a high- quality work process and a team of language experts that would convert 10.000 words every week into Spanish and Portuguese in approximately 48 hours.

Time has been producing its weekly Spanish and Portuguese supplement for over two years and from a business perspective, it is a major success. With readership climbing

(1, 347,000 in 2000), Time has positioned the foreign language supplement as part of a larger programme for Latin America, including CNN en español.

### **3- Education for Integration**

Education is the only way to ensure the integration of all Latin-Americans as free human – beings in a democratic society. Philosophical and theoretical aspects are therefore involved, along with specific, practical issues such as the accreditation of professional degrees and the general coordination of significant components of the educational system.

The educational system certainly plays a vital role in this process of regional integration. Europe has a successful centuries- old tradition of translation and institutions teaching translation are more firmly established than in the US. This country is one of the largest purchasers of translation services as a consequence of a relatively recent boom in global trade. Consequently, only a handful of educational institutions offer degree programs in translation and it is difficult to hold translators to rigorous standards when so many are needed and so few are trained. The same situation arises in Argentina in the case of Spanish- Portuguese Translators since there is only a handful of these specialized professionals in the city of Buenos Aires.

#### **Translators´ status:**

All over the world, major professions such as medicine and law enjoy well-established educational paths, certification, professional standards and organizations, and well- informed consumers. Meanwhile, translators are struggling to develop all these trappings of a profession and to establish standards for conducting their business.

In Argentina, a Legal Translator (also called Publicly Sworn Translator) must meet nationally accepted requirements in education and professional practice and Act 20.305 regulates the activities a Sworn Translator can perform.

However, much promotion must still be accomplished in order to make consumers aware of the standards and practices they should demand. In this sense, the tireless, intensive work carried out by the Colegio de Traductores Públicos de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires Legal Translators´Association) must be highlighted. It has made progress in promoting the profession by creating awareness in society at large of the skill needed to recast text in a foreign tongue.

Institutions of higher education should understand that in a globalized world translation is a strategic imperative, and that swift and sweeping transformations have taken place in the language industry. The powerful demands of the global marketplace have affected the curricula of degree programmes in translation. Thus, universities must train a new generation of translation professionals with cutting – edge strategies and techniques that will allow them to meet the rising need for high quality translation in increasingly shorter times.

#### **Training a new generation of translation professionals**

Taking into consideration the fundamental importance of Mercosur and its future impact on linguistic and educational matters, the curricula for future Degree Programmes in Portuguese – Spanish Legal Translation should be developed taking into

account the dynamic needs and ever- increasing demands of Mercosur enterprises. It is imperative to pay due consideration to the profound changes in the nature of the translator's profession in the last decade so as to offer an effective programme responding to this new distinctive educational demand, focusing on academic attainment levels in relationship to goals (i.e. knowledge and training that would make students readily employable by tuning the programme to the needs of prospective employers).

Future translators should be able to perform successfully in a fast changing environment. To make a real **contribution to integration**, academic institutions should identify issues of real importance so as to provide future translators with better tools, i.e. with a training which goes beyond computer literacy and the honing of language skills. I have focused my attention on the following concerns:

#### **a- Technological Developments:**

For the last ten years and up to the end of the year 2000, the demand for translation in Mercosur rose dramatically, given the boom in international trade and the erratic development of Mercosur.

Pressure on translators to produce high – quality results in shorter times has also increased, especially taking into account that the lack of qualified translators to meet the rising need poses a major problem.

Future translators should be trained to use a variety of tools, ranging from basic word processing and database – management systems to high- end translation memories such as **TRADOS\***.

\* A translation tool that stores previously translated material and leverages it for new translations. Depending on the configuration and sophistication of the system, Translation Memories have varying degrees of matching capability in relating new text to previously translated material.

#### **b - Legal translation:**

The translation of technical texts requires considerable specific knowledge, i.e. not only knowledge about linguistic rules and structures, but also knowledge about the topic of the text to be translated. Knowledge about just one of these two aspects does not suffice to produce translation.

Language and law are two intimately related social phenomena. The distinctive features of a certain linguistic and cultural community manifest themselves through language in the language of law. Therefore, no legal translation can be done accurately without a solid legal basis, presented in an illustrative and contrastive way .

In this sense, Legal Translation is, to some extent, "**comparative terminology**" in as much as the study of the distinctive characteristics of different legal systems is "comparative law studies". It must be pointed out that a legal translator has a two – fold role: not only does he translate from one language into another but also from one legal system into another. This is the main reason why future legal translators must acquire deep knowledge of both systems - grammatical and legal - in order to overcome inherent difficulties derived from the fact that terminology, concepts and institutions may not be equivalent in the target and the source languages .



### c- Court Interpreting:

As far as **interpretation** is concerned, it is necessary to remember that in Argentina, as established by Act 20.305, translators are the only professionals authorized to act as interpreters in judicial matters. Taking into account that the skills of a translator differ from those of an interpreter, professional training in simultaneous and consecutive court interpreting is a must. Alternative Dispute Resolution Courts (ADR) hire interpreters who have specialized in the legal field and they are also indispensable when financial products are offered internationally or when intergovernmental agreements are signed.

### d- Terminology:

In their article “New Trends in Translation oriented Terminology Management”, Golinski and Budin state that the main advantage of terminology can be seen in its crucial role in the process of acquiring, storing and applying both linguistic and subject-specific knowledge related the production of the target text.

Hohnhold (1990) points out that the aim of a comparative terminological text analysis – in source language and target - language (s) is to generate specific text and terminology documentation, leading to a special kind of reference system, with a tailor - made structure designed to satisfy the needs of the translator.

Several major trends that affect the interactive activity of translating and doing terminology work can be identified:

1) Knowledge is developing faster than language and the fundamental changes taking place, in turn, affect language.

2) The formation / coinage of new terms is impeded primarily by the very limited number of term elements available in any language for naming new concepts.

3) The number of concepts increases at practically the same pace as knowledge grows.

However, few universities in Argentina teach Terminology as part of the curricula of their Translation Degree Programmes.

A **translator’s competence** lies predominantly in the transfer process of translating a text from a source language into a target language with precision. On account of the above – mentioned factors, cooperation between specialized translators and subject field specialists is of utmost importance. However, cooperation must necessarily develop beyond this bilateral collaboration on an individual basis.

Mercosur’s linguistic reality clearly shows the need for the creation of international institutions which should devote to organize and coordinate cooperation in this field. It should be pointed out that one of the flaws or weaknesses of Mercosur is the lack of a supranational structure, and very few concrete measures have been taken to establish institutions of such a nature.

In the absence of these institutions, universities must assume this role through their Foreign Language Departments and Translation Schools with the valuable contribution of different Professional Boards and international organizations such as FIT.

The creation of a FIT Latin American Regional Centre has brought new impetus to the process of integration since it aspires to bring together Latin American Associations of translators, and it will surely contribute to establish links with other organizations devoted to aspects of interlingual and intercultural communication. Such a space will promote training and research conducive to the development of joint projects.

### **Conclusion**

Mercosur is still very incipient concerning its initiative, and the peculiarities originated from the specific conditions of South America should be taken into account. This agreement involves countries that periodically go through periods of political instability and in a not too distant past, Argentina and Brazil had staggering inflation rates. Each nation, and the different social groups within it approach the other nations with a set of traditions, cultural values and views about each other which influence the way integration is going to proceed.

The last few years have by no means been easy for Mercosur, but it is important to place it in perspective. The links between the societies and states involved have strong historical roots: economically and culturally, the boundaries between countries have been quite porous, not only in terms of purely economic transactions. Migratory flows in various directions, both for economic reasons and due to political exile, cultural exchanges of various sorts, and tourism have been quite intense. Cultural activities, have been crossing borders continuously. Such antecedents are highly significant in setting the stage for the new process of regional integration.

As Ambassador Botafogo Goncalves, Under Secretary General for Integration, Economic and Foreign Trade Matters at Brazil Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1996, and at present Brazilian Ambassador to Argentina, has repeatedly indicated, the current shape of Mercosur should not be regarded as definitive. Integration has demanded sweeping changes in attitudes and practices and the subject of education still requires greater reflection in order to clarify the future paths of the initiative.

The need for integration and cooperation among the Mercosur member states has grown and the linguistic aspect has been brought to the foreground.

In Brazil, the government has actively encouraged the teaching of Spanish as a means of reinforcing Mercosur's importance. On the whole, the Argentine government has remained rather indifferent to the efforts of creating public awareness of the need to communicate better with our neighbours. Argentines have only recently started to realize the advantages of speaking Portuguese but border regions are peaceful and communication among the countries has had a historical continuity which accounts for the existence of "Portuñol" (a mixture of Spanish and Portuguese which comes very close to a third language) as proof of the cultural integration.

Therefore, it is necessary that universities establish more solid links in order to open new perspectives for community projects of collaboration among Latin American Spanish and Portuguese – speaking countries. By enhancing cultural and scientific cooperation, any remaining ideological or cultural barriers will be broken down. The academic and

scientific work at institutions of higher education should contribute to strengthen the cultural and social integration of Mercosur countries. As the scientific and university communities become more active at the regional level, the old cultural divide between Portuguese and Hispanic cultures will be gradually eliminated.

Further steps should be taken to expand this dialogue through meetings of authorities of higher- education institutions and high level academics to strengthen the relationships among Mercosur countries, create forums for discussions and encourage proposals of common projects.

In spite of the chronic problem of poverty and civil unrest, Latin America has a whole new generation of highly trained professionals, fully capable to deal with globalisation and its implications. They recognise the fact that after so many years in oblivion, Latin America must prepare itself to improve conditions whereby effective interaction between economies and societies can take place, as this is the only way to prosperity.

The on- going linguistic and professional development of Latin American Translators will / should continue to shed light on societal mechanisms that underlie the processes of dialogue among societies and cultures, the basis of mutual respect and concern, and the structures and institutions that may foster inter- cultural creativity. Given the history and current manifestations of discrimination, cultural warfare and xenophobia, higher - education institutions should ultimately provide the kind of training aimed at searching for and putting into practice the means to foster solidarity and understanding. **Acting as social agents of change, translators can contribute to improve the social and cultural regional integration of MERCOSUR member countries and thus bring sustainable benefits to the region.**