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Abstract

The proposed paper aims to elaborate and exemplify systemic hypotheses on the emergence and evolution of legal language semantics, focusing on the semantic analysis of international law concepts, and the diachronic study of their representation and translation into Greek.

Translating international law texts is a semiotically and linguistically marked and laborious process, often requiring the re-organisation of the semantic experience of the legal culture of the TL (Simon 1981: 130-131). In this sense, any attempt to transfer concepts and expositives of international law texts is a critical challenge, i.e. one that requires:

- identifying the rationality and conceptual premises of the discourses of international law, as a semiotic system *per se*, that builds upon a distinct sociolinguistic canvas, that of the “international community” and its global, yet culturally biased, norms of linguistic behaviour;
- identifying the diachronic patterning of the semantics of international law terms and phrasemes in the “national” culture of the TL, following their inevitable cultural, linguistic and legal filtering when transferred or used in national legal instruments and legal texts (Carvalho 2011: xiv).

Drawing on our recent experience of translating Antonio Cassese's major textbook of *International Law* (2e, 2005, OUP) into Greek, our aim is to present and address issues that deal with the concepts and terminology of international law, such as acceptability and informativity, semantic transparency and distinction of the lexemes examined. Also, process-wise, the paper will present the translator's effort to eliminate the semantic ambiguity that would inevitably occur, should the translator ignore the above-mentioned stage of tracing the textual history of “domestication” of specific international legal concepts into the Greek legal culture: this has required decoding and explicating the “implicit norms that determine the *linguistic tango*” (Jutras 2000: 782) caused by the conceptual and cultural interference that is observable in the diachronic assimilation of specific concepts of international law by the norms of Greek legal discourse.

Ex: the notion of *inherent right* (pursuant to Art. 51 of the UN Charter) has traditionally been translated as *φυσικό δικαίωμα* (natural right), a rendering coming directly from the French notion of *droit naturel*, and obviously traced back to the concept of *natural right* and to Aristotle's perception of natural and conventional adjudication (in *Nicomachean Ethics*, cf. Yack 1990: 217ff). Contrary to the Greek legal norm, i.e. the official text of the ratified UN Charter, our corpus research reveals the gradual prevalence of the English lexicalisation of the concept and consequently its semantic degradation, i.e. from an indisputable (natural) legal axiom, to a notion of traditional law that is subject to international adjudication, cf. Cassese 2005: 18.2.3).

Moreover, analysis of our diachronic, *ad hoc* reference corpus comprising legal instruments and comparable academic papers in the field of International Law, reveals a general and quasi omnipresent tendency for (i) *explicitation* and *clarification* (s. Baker 1996); (ii) lexico-semantic *calquing* (s. Vinay & Darbelnet 1958), i.e. inter-linguistic and cultural interference (Toury 1995; Saridakis 2010); and (iii) a *neutralisation* of the *tenor*, i.e. of the interpersonal, metafunction of the texts (s. Halliday 1978; Hatim & Mason 1997), to the benefit of the ideational (i.e. semantico-pragmatic) content of the utterances examined (cf. House 2011).

Last but not least, corpus compilation (consisting of parallel and comparable reference texts and of the

parallel texts of Cassese's original textbook and our translation [*Διεθνές Δίκαιο*]) is aimed to function as as a reference corpus in the area of Legal Linguistics, Terminology and Translation Studies.

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