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TRANSLATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS: A CASE STUDY ON THE TRANSLATION OF MBTI TESTS

PSİKOLOJİ TESTLERİNİN ÇEVİRİSİ: MBTI TESTİNİN ÇEVİRİSİ ÜZERİNE BİR VAKA ÇALIŞMASI

ABSTRACT

Several types of psychological tests are used in order to understand and assess people's behavior. Because of their significant roles in identifying the characteristics of human behavior, psychological tests have started to be translated in various languages. For this reason, providing a functional interlingual translation of a psychological test has become an important concern in the field of psychology. However, the studies focusing on the intricacies of translating psychological tests are still limited in content and quantity. In order to contribute to this developing area of research, this study aims to analyze French and Turkish translations of a certain type of MBTI test written in English with the aim of exploring linguistic and non-linguistic translation constraints. While identifying and explaining the differences between the source and target texts, the study benefits from John Cunnison Catford's model of "translation shifts". As a result of a detailed analysis of the source and target texts, it is found out that French and Turkish translations of the specific psychological test involve both semantic and stylistic shifts as well as some omitted parts. Based on specific examples from the test, this study makes a call for considering semantic and stylistic features of psychological tests in order to improve the functionality and reliability of translations and test results.

Anahtar kelimeler: Translation, psychology tests, MBTI, translation shifts, functionality.

ÖZET

İnsanların davranışlarını anlamak ve değerlendirmek için çeşitli psikoloji testleri kullanılmaktadır. İnsan davranışının özelliklerini belirlemedeki önemli rolleri nedeniyle, psikoloji testleri çeşitli dillere çevirmeye başlanmıştır. Bu nedenle, psikolojik testinin işlevsel bir diller arası çevirisinin sağlanması psikoloji alanında önemli bir konu haline gelmiştir. Ancak, psikoloji testlerinin çevirisinin inceliklerine odaklanan çalışmalar içerik ve nicelik açısından hala sınırlıdır. Bu gelişmekte olan araştırma alanına katkıda bulunmak amacıyla bu çalışma, dilsel ve dil dışı çeviri kısıtlamalarını keşfetmek amacıyla İngilizce yazılmış belirli bir MBTI testinin Fransızca ve Türkçe çevirilerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, kaynak ve erek metinler arasındaki farklılıkların belirlenmesi ve açıklanmasında John Cunnison Catford'un "çeviri kaymaları" modelinden faydalanmaktadır. Kaynak ve erek metinlerin ayrıntılı incelenmesinin sonucunda belli psikoloji testinin Fransızca ve Türkçe çevirilerinin bazı eksiltmelerin yanı sıra, anlamsal ve biçimsel kaymaları içerdiği saptanmıştır. Çalışma, testten elde edilen belirli örnekler üzerinden, çevirilerin ve test sonuçlarının işlevselliği ve güvenilirliğini iyileştirmek için psikoloji testlerinin anlamsal ve biçimsel özelliklerinin göz önünde bulundurulması konusunda çağrıda bulunmaktadır.

Keywords: Çeviri, psikoloji testleri, MBTI, çeviri kaymaları, işlevsellik.

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Introduction

In its general sense, “psychology” is defined as “the science of the facts or phenomena of self” (Dewey, 1982). By its very definition, psychology is essential to human life because it helps us to find answers to various important questions concerning our mind and behavior. Explaining the reasons behind specific human behaviors and the ways human mind works, it can also successfully predict human behavior and help to improve people’s lives to a significant extent.

The field of psychology is mostly studied under the branch of social sciences. Since its emergence as a field of science, psychology has caught a considerable amount of attention from professionals, students and other people of different backgrounds. Especially with the help of the Internet and globalization, psychology tests have recently become quite popular among the younger generations across the world. Instead of creating equivalent tests in different languages, they are preferred to be translated to save money and time. The users of these texts have demanded the translation of these tests as quickly as possible as they have started to improve themselves with various discussions and opinions (Gudmundsson, 2009, pp. 29-30). In other words, the need for these discussions and opinions to be translated into as many different languages as possible has increased to a great extent.

Even though there has emerged an increasing need for the translation of psychological texts in the society, the studies that focus on their intricacies and functionality is quite limited (Fenn et.al., 2020). One of the studies titled “Deconstructing the Translation of Psychological Tests” problematizes the significance of cultural context for the translation process of psychological tests (Bolaños-Medina & González-Ruiz, 2012). Another study titled “Development, Validation and Translation of Psychological Tests” focuses on some steps in translating a test into another language (Fenn et.al., 2020). When the studies in Turkish literature are examined, it is seen that there are no articles on this specific field. Only in one conference paper titled “Translation of Psychology Texts: Basic Issues and Problems”, translation strategies used in the translation of popular psychology journals and academic papers are described (Yurtdaş, 2019). Departing from this research gap, this study aims to provide a comparative analysis of the translation of psychological tests in question. For this purpose, the study examines the main characteristics and types of psychological tests, specifically focusing on the definition, history and translations of *Myers–Briggs Type Indicator* (MBTI) test, obtained from a website called *16personalities.com*. In this context, translation strategies of the selected corpus are identified and described. The differences between the source and target texts are explained according to J. C. Catford’s model of “shift of translation”. In the last part of the study, there will be discussions and suggestions regarding the functionality of translations in this specific area and test type.

1. Main characteristics of psychological tests

A psychological test is generally defined as a certain kind of objective and standardized tool to observe, measure and compare the individuals’ behaviors, characteristics and performances in an attempt to better understand the human nature and describe and predict a person’s behavior after evaluating the test results by using category systems and numerical scales. This comparison can be made between several individuals or between a person’s current and past self. These tests can include verbal as well as written and visual evaluations. Additionally, it is suggested that, for a psychological test to be deemed successful, it should be objective, reliable, valid, standardized and practical (Fenn et.al., 2020).

The language used in psychological tests can be formal or informal, and various everyday expressions can be used to transfer information in these texts. In each case, they must be comprehensible, containing only a small amount of terminology in order for everyone to understand and take the test. If the tests are not clear enough when it comes to instructing the test taker and/or if they do not use a comprehensible language, this could affect the way a test taker gives their responses to them (Loewenthal & Lewis, 2020, pp. 45-48).

As Alicia Bolaños-Medina and Víctor González-Ruiz state in their informative article titled “Deconstructing the Translation of Psychological Tests”, although psychological tests display variety in content and function (there are achievement and aptitude tests, intelligence tests, neuropsychological tests, occupational tests, personality tests and clinical tests) they have some common qualities worth mentioning (2012, pp. 715-722). For instance, the instructions in each types of tests are required to be straightforward and have an imperative tone. In order to attain an impersonal and objective style, present tenses and descriptive verbs are used in these tests (2012, pp. 725-730). In addition, these texts mostly include simple syntactical structures. The use of double negatives is generally avoided in them, since the content needs to be “representative, relevant, diverse, clear, simple and understandable”. In the representation of the content, on the other hand, visual elements, real objects and shapes gain significant roles (Muñiz & Fonseca-Pedrero, 2008, pp. 13-25). For these reasons, these distinguishing stylistic features also become very important in the process of creating functional translations of psychological tests.

2. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as a psychological text type

As stated above, there are several types of psychological tests that are used for different functions. For instance, achievement and aptitude tests usually carried out in employment or educational settings try to measure the level of knowledge the examinee has on a certain topic or the probability level of the examinee having the capacity to master material in a particular area. Intelligence tests, on the other hand, aim at measuring how much a person can understand the world around them and apply this knowledge to enhance their quality of life. There are also neuropsychological tests attempting to measure deficits in cognitive functioning that may have resulted from some sort of brain damage as well as occupational tests that are taken in order to find out which profession suits the test taker’s interests best. Finally, we have personality tests which attempt to pinpoint the test taker’s personality type. This test type is used for research, diagnosis and clinical purposes (Bolaños-Medina & González-Ruiz, 2012, pp. 715-720). The primary subject herein is a personality test, which is called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).

The Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) was created by two Americans, namely Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers, who were inspired by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung’s book titled *Psychological Types* (Pittenger, 1993, p. 467). It asserts that the whole world population can be boiled down to 16 personality categories. This texts sheds light on how people’s perception of the world varies according to their different psychological preferences. The test is so popular, especially among young people, that people nowadays ask each other their MBTI types as casually as they ask each other’s zodiac signs. Despite its popularity, scientists consider this test to be a part of pseudoscience implying its unreliable and invalid nature (1993, pp. 467-469).

After taking the MBTI test, results are presented in four main categories that show binary oppositions: introversion or extraversion, sensing or intuition, thinking or feeling, and judging or perceiving. One letter from each subcategory is used to form a four-letter result. The sixteen personality types include ISTF, ISFJ, INFJ, INTJ, ISTP, ISFP, INFP, INTP, ESTP, ESFP, ENFP, ENTP, ESTJ, ESFJ, ENFJ and ENTJ¹.

Since the authors of this study have taken the test themselves and obtained the result of INTJ and hence have more knowledge on this text type, this article will specifically focus on the translation of the result page of INTJ personality type. In order to take the test, *16personalities.com* website has been chosen. *16personalities.com* is a website created in 2011 by NERIS Analytics Limited (based in United Kingdom) and has one of the most prolific team who is dealing with updating their website. They post new articles about character types almost daily and they have a map on their website showing various characteristics (e.g. introverted or extroverted) of countries. In the test on the website, there are around 60 questions and each question has a 7-degree agreement/disagreement scale. After getting the result, you are given a long report about your personality type, your social, working and love life, your strong and weak qualities, your parental skills and your career path.

3. Methodology and theoretical framework

This study aims to provide a comparative analysis of the translation of psychological tests and test results, focusing on their French and Turkish translations. The data are obtained from the result page of the “INTJ” personality type on *16personalities.com*. The differences between the source text and their translations are identified and described according to J.C. Catford’s model of “shift of translation” (1965). According to Catford, during the act of translation, different types of shifts occur depending on the translation. He defines “*shifts*” as “*departures from formal correspondence*” while moving from the source language to the target language. They occur in an attempt for the translator to find the “*natural*” equivalent of the source text in the target text (1965, p. 73). In short, translators resort to shifts because of differences between languages and cultures on various levels.

Catford states that there are two main types of shifts: “*the level/rank shift and the category shift*”. “*Level/rank shift*” refers to the act of an element in ST and TT being on different linguistic levels. “*Category shift*” refers to the departure from formal correspondence, i.e. the change in the grammatical category in ST and in TT during the act of translation. The category shift is divided into 4 subgroups. These are “*structure shifts*” referring to changes on grammatical level; “*class shifts*” happening when an item in the SL is translated into TL in a way that the item becomes the member of a different class from the original version; “*unit shift*” refers to unit ranks on a different level in TL than it does in SL when it’s translated, and “*intra-system shifts*” imply the shifts that occur within the system in which TL and SL share similar systems (1965, pp. 73-82). Based on this theoretical framework, the following section of the study presents a detailed comparative analysis of the translation of the selected corpus.

¹ Bkz. < <https://www.16personalities.com/personality-types> >

4. Translation of the MBTI Test

This section of the study analyzes the translation of a MBTI test and the result of INTJ character type obtained from the website called *16personalities.com* in the language pairs between English (ST1) and French (TT1), English (ST1) and Turkish (TT2), French (TT1) and Turkish (TT2) in an attempt to identify and describe some translation shifts. In the analysis, the shifts will be examined in terms of semantic elements, stylistic elements, omissions and additions.

4.1. Translation of semantic and stylistic elements

In these types of texts, certain kinds of expressions may be used depending on which language is being preferred. In this section, a comparative analysis of the translations of semantic and stylistic elements in the selected MBTI test and the result of INTJ character type will be presented, benefiting from the theoretical framework shaped by Catford's model of "shift of expression" (1965).

4.1.1. Analyzing semantic and stylistic elements of tests and their translations

Psychological tests are inclined to use different lexical elements such as idioms and certain phrases. As psychology is a specialized field, understanding these texts may require a certain level of knowledge on their terminology and subject area. However, in most cases, psychology tests try to use an easily comprehensible language with several references to the target culture with the aim of making the readers feel more familiar with the language of tests. However, because of the differences in the linguistic structure and semantic fields of languages, it is possible to encounter some semantic shifts in the target texts, some of which are exemplified below.

Example 1:

ST1: "To take the test"

TT1: "Passez le test"

Back (literal) translation: Take/pass the test.

TT2: "Teste girin"

Back (literal) translation: Enter the test.

Before starting the test, the users are instructed with the expression "to take the test" in English. However, as it is seen in the translations, French and Turkish texts explain it with two different expressions, namely "to pass the test" and "to enter the test" respectively, which creates shifts on semantic levels. French translation "passez le test" means both "to take the test" and "to pass the test." Turkish translation, on the other hand, uses a different expression ("teste girin" (to enter the test)), which asks the users to enter it. As is clear, the expression in TT1 has a broader semantic field than the ST. The expression in TT2, however, uses an expression from a different semantic field. For these reasons, it is possible to say that Turkish translation makes the readers to carry out a different action, to enter into something, which creates a shift on semantic level.

Apart from the observed semantic shift in the translation of the selected test, it is also possible to observe shifts on stylistic levels, resulting from the differences in the formality level of the language used in the source and target languages. As explained in the previous sections of the study, the language used in psychological tests can be formal or informal, and various everyday

expressions can be used to formulate the tests. In light with this knowledge, translations in the following examples will be analyzed in terms of reflecting the stylistic elements of the source texts.

Example 2:

ST1: “*You are more inclined to follow your head than your heart.*”

TT1: “*La logique est généralement plus importante que les sentiments lorsqu’il s’agit de prendre des décisions importantes.*”

Back (literal) translation: Logic is usually more important than feelings when it comes to making important decisions.

TT2: “*Önemli kararlar verirken, mantık genellikle kalpten daha önemlidir.*”

Back (literal) translation: When making important decisions, logic is often more important than the heart.

As is known, the expression “follow your head than your heart” is a common expression in everyday English used when someone is confused about something. It is translated as “*La logique est généralement plus importante que les sentiments*” in French and “*Mantık genellikle kalpten daha önemlidir*” in Turkish. As is seen, the English version benefits from using metaphorical expressions formed with the words “heart” and “head”. However, these words which are related to concrete parts of a human body are not maintained in either of the translations. “Heart” is transferred as “*logique*” (logic) and “*mantık*” (logic) in French and Turkish translations respectively. As a result, it is possible to mention that the translations create more formal expressions than the source text, which can be considered a shift on stylistic level. However, when we compare the translations in terms of formality, it is possible to claim that French version is more formal than the Turkish one.

Example 3:

ST1: “*You struggle with deadlines.*”

TT1: “*Vous avez tendance à tout remettre à plus tard jusqu’à ce qu’il ne reste plus assez de temps pour tout faire.*”

Back (literal) translation: You tend to procrastinate until there is not enough time left to do everything.

TT2: “*Her şeyi yapmaya yeterli zaman kalmayana kadar oyalanma eğiliminiz var.*”

Back (literal) translation: You have a tendency to linger until there is not enough time to do everything.

In one of the questions of the test, the example sentence is used. As is seen, with the usage of the word “struggle”, there’s an air of empathy, friendliness and therefore an informality in the English version. The sentence is very short and concise. In the French and Turkish versions, on the other hand, the translators seem to have preferred to use long sentences with a very formal and easily comprehensible language. However, when we compare French and Turkish versions, it is possible to say that French text uses a more formal expression. Therefore, a stylistic shift is observed on both translations.

After comparing the translated texts with their English source texts, the following examples only present a comparison of the translations as they do not have any correspondent texts in the English version. This means that there have been some additions in the target texts. These target texts are also examined on semantic and stylistic levels with specific examples.

Example 4:

TT1: “*En ce qui concerne les principes, pas question de céder un pouce*”

Back (literal) translation: When it comes to principles, no way to give an inch.

TT2: “*Prensip meselelerinde kaya gibi sağlam ol.*”

Back (literal) translation: Be rock solid in matters of principle.

While explaining a specific characteristic of INTJ character type, the French phrase “*pas question de céder un pouce*”, which can be literally translated as “*not give an inch*” is used. In the Turkish version, it is rendered with a Turkish idiom “*kaya gibi sağlam ol*”, which can be literally translated as *be “rock solid”*. Even though both translations prefer to use informal expressions, the syntactic structure of the French translation render the sentences in a more formal way than the Turkish translation, which leads to syntactic shifts in the target texts.

Example 5:

TT1: “*Vous perdez fréquemment vos affaires.*”

Back (literal) translation: You frequently lose your belongings.

TT2: “*Eşyalarınızı sık sık yanlış yerlere koyuyorsunuz.*”

Back (literal) translation: You often put your things in the wrong places.

The French sentence “*Vous perdez fréquemment vos affaires*” is rendered as “*Eşyalarınızı sık sık yanlış yerlere koyuyorsunuz*” in the Turkish version, which involves a semantic shift. The word “*Perdez*” in the French version creates a more negative association regarding the action than the Turkish expression “*yanlış yere koymak*” (to put sth in the wrong place). In other words, “*perdez*” is a much stronger expression while the expression “*yanlış yerlere koymak*” denotes a less negative association regarding the action. For this reason, it is possible to evaluate this example as a semantic shift.

Example 6:

TT1: “*Vous ne vous laissez distraire que rarement par vos rêves et pensées.*”

Back (literal) translation: *You rarely get distracted by your dreams and thoughts.*

TT2: “*Fantezilere ve fikirlere nadiren kapılıyorsunuz.*”

Back (literal) translation: *You rarely get caught up in fantasies and ideas.*

In this example, the French version can be literally translated as is “*You rarely get distracted by your dreams and thoughts.*” On the other hand, the Turkish version can be literally translated as “*You rarely get caught up in fantasies and ideas.*” In these sentences, a shift in tone is observed, resulting from different word choices. While the French version has a softer, more distant tone, the Turkish version uses a more familiar, more informal tone. In this way, the Turkish

version might help the readers feel more understood and relaxed while taking a test which will convey messages about their personality.

Example 7:

TT1: “*Vous êtes une personne relativement calme et réservée.*”

Back literal translation: You are a relatively calm and reserved person.

TT2: “*Nispeten ketum ve sessiz birisiniz.*”

Back (literal) translation: You are relatively reserved and quiet.

Although the words “réservée” and “ketum” are both translated into English as “reserved”, the word “réservée” in this context describes the state of being introverted. Therefore, the word “réservée” has more positive connotation than the word “ketum” in the Turkish version, which creates semantic shift in French translation.

Example 8:

TT1: “*Vous vous sentez rarement inquiet(-ète).*”

Back (literal) translation: You rarely feel worried.

TT2: “*Kendinizi nadiren güvensiz hissediyorsunuz.*”

Back (literal) translation: You rarely feel insecure.

In this example, TT1 and TT2 display another example of semantic shift as the words that have been chosen in the translated versions have two completely different meanings. While the word “*inquiet (-ète)*” means “worried”, the word “*güvensiz*” means “insecure” in English. This shift may cause the French and Turkish test-takers to give different answers to the same question, which may also affect the result they get.

To sum up, the selected examples reveal that the translation of the selected psychological test involve some semantic and stylistic shifts that may have an effect on the results of the test. For this reason, it is of high importance to analyze the semantic and stylistic features of tests with the aim of creating functional translations. As the examples show, language used in the English version is the most informal one followed by the Turkish translations, and the most formal version is the French translations. Based on the examples analyzed here, it is also possible to speculate that French text has been used as proto-type of the Turkish translation.

4.2. Other differences between ST, TT1 and TT2

After analyzing the translations of the selected tests on semantic and stylistic levels, this section provides some other pieces of information regarding additions and omissions identified between the source text and the translations after taking the test in English (ST), French (TT1) and Turkish (TT2). The observed differences between the source text and the translations can be summarized as follows:

- The questions of the test appear on the same pages in the Turkish and French versions while they appear on different pages in the English version.
- At the end of the test, the gender of the test-taker is asked only in the English version.

- Before showing the test results, the name and age of the test-taker are asked only in the English version.
- The result differs in two aspects in the English version. For example, there is a distinction between INTJ-T and INTJ-A character types and they are both explained in the English version while they are not explained in the French or Turkish versions.
- There exists a “your profile” section in the English version on the result page while it is not available in the French or Turkish versions.
- In the English version, the “result” page gives a more elaborate explanation whereas in the Turkish version, only the first page is presented in Turkish. In the French version, there exists only one page for results and the pages do change according to the person who takes the test.
- There are dozens of reports on the “result” page the in the English version. They do not exist, however, in the French and Turkish versions.
- Although the authors have obtained the same result on every version of the test, their feelings and attitudes have changed in each of them.

As is clear from the explanations given above, the presentation of the content of the psychological test show differences in the source and target texts. In other words, some omissions are observed both in Turkish and French versions, which are mostly related to presentation of content and formal features. Based on these examples, it is possible to conclude that, while preparing this website, the focus was mainly on the English-speaking audience. This can be concluded from the fact that the English version of the website provides detailed information on these sixteen personality types and their result pages. On the other hand, the French and Turkish versions of the website (including test and result pages) gives the impression of having being prepared in a more haphazard way. The mentioned omissions in the presentation of the content in the French and Turkish versions also affect the results the test-taker obtains. For this reason, this makes a call for not only considering linguistic, stylistic and cultural differences between different languages, but also providing complete information in the translated versions of the test.

5. Conclusion

This study has aimed to shed light on the main issue of translating psychological texts by means of analyzing translations of a specific psychological test type and make a contribution to the theoretical discussions in this specific field. For this purpose, before the analysis part, the types and main characteristics of psychological tests were discussed in detail. In the next section, general information about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test, the main focus of this study, was provided with additional information on the MBTI website (*16personalities.com*). In the methodology part of the study, J. C. Catford’s model of “shift of translation” was briefly explained. In the fifth part, selected examples from the test were analyzed and observed shifts were identified and discussed on different levels. In the conclusion part, the study made a call for the improvement of the functionality of translated psychological tests.

As a result of a detailed comparative analysis, some translation shifts were identified and the probable reasons behind these shifts were explained. In examples (1), (5), (7), (8) semantic shifts resulting from differences in word choices were identified. In examples (2), (3), (4), (6),

stylistic shifts resulting from differences in formality of expressions were found described. It was also shown that the shifts observed both on semantic and stylistic level resulted mainly from the linguistic, stylistic and cultural differences between the languages. Apart from describing and explaining shifts between the source and target texts, differences in the presentation of the content of the psychological test were also problematized. Although the test in English was found out to be a source of considerable entertainment and information, the translated versions fell short of reflecting all of the ideas that were present in the original version. For these reasons, it was concluded that the functionality all the target languages that are presented on the website need to be re-examined in terms of representing semantic and stylistic features of the source text. In this way, it can be also possible to improve the functionality and reliability of the test results.

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