Interpretant Translation, Object Translation and Representamen Translation in IT Projects

Coen Suurmond
Cesuur

In an IT project the semiosphere of the user will be changed as a consequence of the introduction of new sign systems. I will argue that in such projects there should be a path leading from interpretant translation via object translation to representamen translation (Marais 2019). Interpretant translation is about (1) loosening the user from his daily routine and about contextualising meaning; and (2) about loosening the (external) consultant from his daily abstract routines and getting a sense for specific action context. The second translation is object translation where “business things” are discussed and possibly redefined (the term “business object” has too many different meanings to be of practical use here). This translation process requires the interpretation translation process where users and consultants have developed an understanding for each other’s world (semiosphere). The third translation is the representamen translation where existing terminology will be partially replaced by new terminology, in order to express more specific meanings. This last translation process is a primarily intralingual process against the background of the earlier translation processes of interpretants and objects, where the first two translation processes are primarily intersemiotical.

While the conventional approach to IT projects neglects the differences between sign systems and assumes static and unproblematic meanings of terms, this alternative approach starts from the notions that (1) transition processes to new systems must deal with a wide variety of translation issues for all participants, (2) processes and meanings will change as a result of being questioned, and (3) the project should result in the capability of users to translate information to and from IT systems in doing their jobs.

An important but often unattended aspect in IT projects is the phenomenon that both during the project and afterwards using the new IT system operationally, habits and meanings will shift in not fully predictable ways. New practices and new social facts will emerge. Morin wrote: “the autonomy of the living needs to be known in its environment”. As the environment of the users is changed as a result of the project, and the environment of the project members is changed during the project as a result of collaborating in the project, application of only simple cause-and-effect reasoning in the project will be insufficient. A complexity approach is needed where goal oriented behaviour is combined with an awareness of “the principle of ecology of action” (Morin).

References

BYRNE, David; CALLAGHAN, Gill, 2014. *Complexity Theory and the Social Sciences*. London and New York: Routledge.
MARAIS, Kobus, 2014. *Translation Theory and Development Studies.* New York & London: Routledge.
MARAIS, Kobus, 2019. *A (Bio)Semiotic Theory of Translation.* New York & London: Routledge.

MORIN, Edgar, 2006. *Restricted Complexity, General Complexity*.
http://cogprints.org/5217/1/Morin.pdf.