

THE VISIBILITY/INVISIBILITY OF TRANSLATION

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Abstract: The present paper will examine the concept of ‘visibility / invisibility’ of the translator as proposed by Venuti (1995), while concentrating on the cultural differences, on the interface between the source culture and the target one as applied to a text selected from *The Economist*.

1. Venuti’s concept of visibility/invisibility

Venuti (1995) used the term *invisibility* to describe the translator’s situation and activity in contemporary Anglo-American culture. In his opinion, invisibility is typically produced by (i) the way translators tend to translate fluently, to produce an idiomatic and readable target text, thus creating an illusion of transparency, and (ii) the way the translated texts are typically read in the target culture. Venuti maintains that a translated text (poetry, fiction, non-fiction) is judged acceptable when it reads fluently, when there are no linguistic or stylistic peculiarities and this makes the text transparent. Such a translated text gives the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text, namely the appearance that the translation is not a translation, but the original.

As Venuti says, such a view illustrates the idea that translation is a derivative, of secondary quality and importance, an act which should be concealed, as the author is of paramount importance, not the translator.

Visibility/invisibility are discussed together with two translating strategies – *domestication* and *foreignization*. Domesticating means translating in a transparent, fluent, invisible style in order to minimize the foreignness of the TT, in other words “moving the author towards the reader” as Schleiermacher put it. Domesticating also means adhering to the literary formats of the target language by carefully selecting the texts that are likely to lend themselves to such a translating strategy.

Foreignization means that the foreign text which has been selected for translation entails developing a translation method along lines which are generally excluded by the cultural values in the target language. In Schleiermacher’s view that means leaving the writer alone as much as possible and moving the reader towards the writer. Foreignizing is thus a non-fluent or estranging translation style which makes the presence of the translator visible by highlighting the foreign identity of the source text, while protecting it against the ideological dominance of the target culture.

Venuti insisted on foreignizing or *minoritizing*, as he also calls it and listed a number of elements which are considered to be distinctive of foreignization:

- (1) a. close adherence to the ST structure and syntax;
- b. the use of calques;
- c. the use of archaic structures;
- d. the juxtaposition of archaisms and modern colloquial structures;
- e. spelling (when translating into a language where spelling is a problem).

Nevertheless, foreignization also involves some domestication because it translates a ST into a foreign language, for a foreign culture and depends on the dominant-culture values to become visible when the translation departs from them. The major problem that Venuti retains in relation to domestication and foreignization is how much a translation assimilates a

foreign text to the translating language and culture and how much it signals the differences of that text. Therefore, the basic question is whether the foreign should be received as foreign or whether the target text should be deformed so as to prevent the foreign from becoming apparent (Bell 1991, Ionescu 2000/2003). In other words, the basic question is whether the translator should make use of his creativity to a lesser or a larger extent, while not affecting the creativity and variation of the original (Baker 1992).

2. Berman's 'negative analytic' of translation

In his examination of the forms of deformation, termed *negative analytic*, Berman (1984) identifies twelve deforming tendencies that practically are domesticating techniques :

- (2) a. *rationalization*, which affects syntactic structures, punctuation and word order as well as the translation of verbs by nominal forms;
- b. *clarification*, namely explicitation of what does not which to be clear in the original;
- c. *expansion*, which means that TTs are longer than STs, because of empty explicitation or overtranslation;
- d. *ennoblement* – the translator tries to improve on the original by writing it in a more elegant style, which results in the annihilation of the oral rhetoric of the ST; the same effect is obtained by a too free use of colloquialisms in a text which is not colloquial;
- e. *qualitative impoverishment* – the TT makes use of lexical units that lack the richness or the metaphoric or iconic features of the original (e.g. *fluture*);
- f. *quantitative impoverishment* – the loss of lexical variation in translation (e.g. *mutră, față, figură*, translated as 'face');
- g. *the destruction of rhythms* – very common in poetry, but sometimes important in prose as well;
- h. *the destruction of the underlying networks of signification* – the translator should not destroy the network created by the use of certain words throughout the text, words that individually may not be significant, but they add a certain underlying uniformity and sense to the text;
- i. *the destruction of linguistic patterns* – translation tends to be asystematic in the use of sentence patterns and constructions, because of the various translating strategies uses (modulation, transposition, rephrasing, etc);
- j. *the destruction of the vernacular networks or their exorcization* – local speech and language patterns may be lost in translation or they may be exorcized by using italics, or a solution is sought to the replace the instances appearing in ST by a vernacular or slang solution in the TL, which Berman considers ridiculous;
- k. *the destruction of expressions and idioms* – replacing ST idioms and proverbs by their TL equivalents is considered ethnocentrism by Berman; for instance, if the English text makes reference to Bedlam (a well-known asylum for the insane) when translating it into Romanian it should not be replaced by e.g. 'Spitalul 9' or 'Marcuța', since this would result in a TT that would produce a network of Romanian cultural references, not an English one.
- l. *the effacement of the superimposition of languages* – translation tends to efface traces of different forms of the SL that co-exist in the ST (sociolects, idiolects, aso).

The solution offered by Berman is *literal* translation, but not in the classical sense. He uses *literal* as a way to point to the signifying process, to a Saussurean perspective (Fawcett 1997), to a positive transformation of the TL.

3. Analysis of a text selected from *The Economist*

The text selected for this analysis is extracted from *The Economist*, and was published on May 27th 2006. It is an article published under that column of the magazine called 'Leaders', which generally prints reports on the most significant economic and political events. It is a column which publishes four or five reports on topics believed to have a huge impact on the global situation. For instance, the May 27th 2006 issue publishes five articles on the topics such as: the capital market, Russian oil, the future of Europe, the situation in Iran, the situation in Indonesia, a country emerging out a long period of dictatorship. It is generally known that this magazine addresses an educated readership with a taste for economic and political issues at world level and the language used by the writers is highly cultivated, indeed exquisite.

The article to be examined is entitled 'Bears in the woods', but it has nothing to do with nature, it does not, as we might expect, tackle environmental issues. In fact it approaches matters related to the capital markets and their impact on the global economy. Reading and understanding such a text presupposes some knowledge of the field of economics, namely the stock markets or a lot of experience as translator, when the problem of translating the text arises.

(3) Text:

Despite the rattled markets, the world economy is relatively strong. Just don't bet your house on it

If you meet a bear in the woods, try not to panic or scream; on no account should you turn your back and run. As markets around the world have turned grizzly over the past two weeks, some investors seem to have forgotten the old hikers' maxim. After three years of big gains, many stock markets have tumbled by 10% or more in less than ten days. The loudest growls have echoed around emerging markets and commodities. Europe has surrendered most of this year's gains. Americans have so far escaped lightly, but they would be unwise to take comfort. Their housing market, the recent rock of their economy, is where a much grizzlier creature lies in wait.

Most investors tend to look first at equity markets – and they have certainly had a good run virtually everywhere. Yet, a repeat of the slump after the bursting of the dotcom bubble in 2001-02 remains highly unlikely. In 2000 shares were wildly overvalued. Today price/earnings ratios in most stock markets are near, if not below, their long-term averages. This suggests that the slide in shares could be short-lived.

So what has caused this burst of volatility? One popular explanation conjures up fears of rising inflation and hence higher interest rates. Yet this sits oddly with the fall in bond yields and the gold price over the past week: if inflation were the culprit, you would expect both to have risen. The real puzzle is not why volatility has suddenly increased, but why it has been so low in the past year or so. The answer seems to be an abundance of cheap money, which lured investors into complacency. Now they are starting to demand higher returns on riskier assets. Emerging-market equities and metals, not (generally safer) bonds, suffered the biggest mauling in the past week. It could be a healthy correction.

(4) Translation 1 (foreignizing):

In ciuda piețelor zdruncinate, economia mondială este relativ puternică. Numai nu pariați pe casa voastră

Dacă te întâlnești cu un urs în pădure, încearcă să nu te panichezi și să nu strigi, în nici un caz nu trebuie să te întorci cu spatele și să fugi. Acum piețele din toată lumea au

devenit asemeni unor urși grizli în ultimele două săptămâni, unii investitori par să fi uitat maxima excursionsiștilor încercați. După trei ani de mari câștiguri, multe burse s-au prăbușit cu mai mult de 10% în zece zile. Cele mai sonore mârâituri s-au auzit de pe piețele în tranziție și din zona bunurilor de consum. Europa pierdut deja majoritatea câștigurilor din acest an. Americanii au scăpat ușor până acum, dar nu ar fi înțelepți dacă s-ar relaxa. Piața lor de locuințe, recenta stâncă a economiei americane, este locul unde o creatură mult mai asemănătoare unui urs stă la pândă.

Majoritatea investitorilor tindă să analizeze întâi piețele de capital – și desigur au avut de alergat aproape peste tot. Toruși, o repetare a crizei de după explozia bulei punctcom din 2001-02 rămâne forate improbabilă. În 2002 acțiunile erau exagerat de supraevaluate. Astăzi raportul preț/câștig la majoritatea burselor este aproape, dacă nu sub, media pe termen lung. Aceasta sugerează că scăderea acțiunilor va avea o viață scurtă.

Deci, ce a cauzat această izbucnire de volatilitate? O explicație populară se referă la temerile față de inflația crescândă și deci rate mai mari ale dobânzilor. Totuși, așa ceva nu se potrivește cu scăderea randamentului obligațiunilor și a prețului aurului de săptămâna trecută: dacă inflația ar fi vinovată, te-ai aștepta să crească amândouă. Adevărata problemă nu este de ce a crescut brusc volatilitatea, ci de ce a fost atât de scăzută în ultimul an. Răspunsul pare să fie o abundență de bani ieftini, care i-au făcut pe investitori să de complacă în această situație. Acum încep să ceară rentabilitate mai mare pentru active mai riscante. Capitalurile de pe piețele în tranziție și metalele, nu obligațiunile (în general mai sigure) au suferit cele mai mari deprecieri săptămâna trecută. Ar putea fi o corecție sănătoasă.

(5) Translation 2 (domesticating):

Deși piețele se zdruncină, economia lumii rămâne relativ puternică. Dar să nu vă puneți casa la bătaie pentru asta

Dacă dai peste un urs în pădure, nu intra în panică, nici nu începe să strigi și în nici un caz nu-ți întoarce spatele ca s-o iei la fugă. În ultimele două săptămâni, piețele din întreaga lume au devenit din ce în ce mai cenușii, asemeni unui urs grizli și se pare că mulți investitori au uitat adagiul excursionsiștilor încercați. După o perioadă de trei ani de câștig, multe piețe bursiere au înregistrat căderi pe peste 10% în mai puțin de zece zile. Cele mai răsunătoare căderi au avut loc pe piețele în tranziție și la bursele de mărfuri, iar Europa a fost cea care pierdut mai tot ce a câștigat în acest an. Până acum, americanii au scăpat ieftin, dar nu ar fi înțelept din partea lor să se culce pe-o ureche, căci tocmai pe piața locuințelor, care, nu de multă vreme, este pilonul economiei americane, se profilează o amenințare mult mai întunecată.

Tendența multor investitori este să analizeze în primul rând piețele de capital, unde, aproape peste tot, chiar le-a mers foarte bine. Firește, este puțin probabil că s-ar putea repeta acea prăbușire care a avut loc în 2001-2002 după ce s-a spart balonul punctcom. În 2002 acțiunile erau exagerat de supraevaluate. Astăzi, însă, la majoritatea burselor raportul preț/câștig este aproximativ egal cu media pe termen lung, ceea ce indică posibilitatea ca scăderea randamentului acțiunilor să fie de scurtă durată.

Oare ce a dus la această manifestare de volatilitate? Există o explicație larg răspândită care se bazează pe ideea de creștere a inflației și deci de creștere a ratei dobânzii. Numai că o asemenea explicație nu se potrivește cu faptul că săptămâna trecută a scăzut randamentul obligațiunilor și câștigul pe piața metalelor. Dacă problema ar fi inflația, ambele ar trebui să crească. Adevărata problemă nu este de ce a crescut brusc volatilitatea, ci de ce a fost atât de scăzută anul aproape tot anul trecut. Se pare că

răspunsul este dat de marea cantitate de bani ieftini care i-a ademenit pe investitori și i-a făcut să se culce pe-o ureche, iar acum doresc câștiguri mai mari pentru active mai riscante. Cele mai mari deprecieri petrecute săptămâna trecută nu au afectat obligațiunile (în general mai sigure), ci acțiunile și valoarea metalelor pe piețele în tranziție, ceea ce ar putea fi ajustare/corecție sănătoasă.

In fact, the two translated variants of the text proposed for analysis demonstrate that foreignizing, as defined by Venuti does not always work. The foreignized variant sounds strange, awkward, practically drafted in bad Romanian. The second variant, the domesticated one, goes along Berman's *negative analytic* and the result is a text which reads far better in Romanian. To conclude, I would like to say that, contrary to Venuti, the more visible the translator is the better his work. To me visibility means a very good translation, one that really proves the translator's ability to render a text in the target language. Therefore, in this sense the translator should be highly visible, not invisible.

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