

FIDELITY, ALTERITY AND SHIFTING BORDERS IN TRANSLATION

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Abstract: The translator as communicator across linguistic and cultural boundaries should be aware of the cultural power differentials and develop a set of feasible strategies in dealing with such a text type. The text type can be seen as carrying over the text producer's beliefs and his/her own identity, which is shaped by the higher pre-potent one: the global social and cultural identity of the speech community to which s/he belongs. Things become more complex with the translated text since there is multiplicity of identities: those belonging to the source language culture and those characterising the target language culture.

The translator as communicator across linguistic and cultural boundaries should be aware of the cultural power differentials and develop a set of feasible strategies in dealing with different text types. No matter the text type involved in translation, it can be seen as carrying over the text producer's beliefs and his/her own identity, which is shaped by the higher pre-potent one: the global social and cultural identity of the speech community to which s/he belongs.

To our mind, the degree of mediation or the translator's visibility in the translation of literary texts becomes high indeed since literary translation is *par excellence* the space where the translator asserts his/her identity. One of the arguments is that the name of the translator is mentioned on the front page. It is a question of the translator's responsibility as well as of the acknowledgement of the translator's status (prestige).

Literary texts, encompassed by expressive texts, were considered by Romantic and post-Romantic translators to be untranslatable. If it had been so, then comparative literature would not have emerged.

Literary translation should not be identified with hermeneutics since the translator does not establish any hierarchy or select authors in the canon. Instead, *literalness* becomes the key word. In the traditional Romantic approach, the writer is a quasi-divine creator or a genius. He is the *locus* of that unique, organic and transcendental creation. Consequently, translation is a copy of a unique entity that, by its very nature, cannot be reproduced. The translator is not God-gifted; on the contrary, s/he experiences dull routine.

Contemporary approaches to literary translation discard the idea of divine creation. Their very tenet is that the translator shows empathy to the writer of the original which s/he feels bound to promote. This receptiveness allows a close reading of the original, a macroscopic look at the whole and a microscopic one at its component parts. Of course, there is a re-reading process since the translator searches for the essence, filtering out relevant information which will be transferred and re-shaped according to the readership's expectations. The translator will acquire further knowledge (by reading other works of the same writer, reviews of the text to be translated, historical documents describing the age in which the author lived etc) in order to unearth the hidden agenda and to make meaning available¹. Such knowledge proves essential for the paratext that accompanies the translation of a literary text: preface, postface, notes etc.

¹ "Le fait que nous désignons par les mêmes mots «avare» et «usurie» un personnage de Plaute (IIIe siècle av. J.C.) de Molière, de Balzac est [...] digne d'intérêt: ces deux termes, dans la mesure où ils attirent notre attention sur les caractères communs aux trois personnages, nous empêchent d'apercevoir (sauf à travers un long commentaire philologique) les différences profondes entre ces trois personnages, du point de vue psychologique, économique et sociologique." (Mounin 1965: 60, quoted by Tatilon 1986: 23)

Serious imaginative literature should be envisaged as a polysystem, in which different genres, schools, tendencies are competing with each other for readership, prestige and power. Literary texts are not static entities (as they were for canonists), but highly kinetic multi-voiced instances. A kinetic work will never be the same and that explains the provisionality of translation, the different numbers of the translations of the same text by various translators or by the same translator at different periods of time. The temporal gap means more experience and a new worldview according to the development stage of the individual and collective consciousness. Besides, the writer's idiolect should be viewed as a creative, de-automated exploitation of the language potential against which ordinary language represents a reduction (by using a MINIMAX strategy of communication).

Literary texts offer a new vision of the world rather than masking reality (Leibnitz' possible worlds are at stake here): "Literary texts [...] whose world stands in a principled alternativity relationship to the accepted version of the real world [...]" (Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 186)

The translator should, by all means, facilitate the understanding and appreciation of the literary work by a downgrading (finding motivation that integrates unexpected occurrences) or upgrading procedure (discovering their special significance). The reticular analysis of the text is done on the purpose of "opening" it, in the sense defined by Umberto Eco (1962: 6) – the reception of the literary production by the reader-consumer actively restores the system. This opening is due to the ambiguity that characterizes the work of art as well as the translator's autonomy who interprets the text according to his/her background, sensitivities and sensibilities.

In the 1970s, Even-Zohar developed *the polysystem theory* in translation under the influence of Russian formalism (dating back to 1920s): the literary text is part of a whole literary system that constantly interacts with some other elements², i.e. the literary text is a cultural artifact interrelating to other systems of signification. Even-Zohar (1978/2000) states that the translations of literary texts make up a system in which the selection of texts to be translated depends on the target language cultural values and translation norms, in their turn derived from the interaction with other systems. All these co-systems are embraced by the *polysystem* to be understood as an aggregate of different elements hierarchically organized. The polysystem dynamics engenders reversal of values and interchanges between innovative and conservative values. This is the rationale for selecting and translating some authors or texts which are considered cultural paradigms for the target language system:

- Any new literature needs points of reference, hegemonic values to raise the desire to equal or excel others;
- There is *peripheral literature* (Even-Zohar 1978/2000: 194), which imports genres and literary types which it does not have at its disposal;
- There are crucial moments in the history of literary criticism when old models are abandoned in favour of new exotic ones.

On the other hand, literary translation plays its part in the establishment of the cultural values of the target language system, and it becomes part of the polysystem. The strategy of translation is influenced by the value which is attached to literary translation, i.e. if it is highly valued, the translator's freedom will be greater indeed.

Toury can be rightly considered Even-Zohar's follower; he develops a series of descriptors for the translation of literary texts according to the literary genre, the historical period and the author. His methodology underpins the following ideas:

² The idea of Saussurean *value* is to be found here.

- A close examination of literary translations in order to identify recurrent equivalences or *regularities of behaviour* (Toury 1995: 55);
- Analysis of the explicit references to the norms which are observed in translation, i.e. translators', editors', reviewers' and employers' comments. Nevertheless, Toury is sceptical about the results of such an investigation as there is too much subjectivity.

Taking over from the polysystem theory, *The Manipulation School*, mainly represented by Hermans and Lefevere, also focuses on descriptive studies and elaborates a new framework in which theoretical models and case studies provide objective scientific data. Literary translation is governed text production and reception norms and its place within the literary system and the interaction of the latter with other literary systems weigh heavily. Furthermore, literary translation can retroactively influence the source language literary (and cultural) system.

Lefevere (1992) lays emphasis on the factors that determine the literary text reception, i.e. power and ideology. The literary text is actually re-written in translation according to the translator's ideological affiliation and according to what Lefevere (1992: 2) calls *poetology*: "The motivation for such rewriting can be ideological (conforming to or rebelling against the dominant ideology) or poetological (conforming to or rebelling against the dominant /preferred poetics)."

Lefevere defines ideology *largo sensu* as set of conventions and beliefs (not only of political nature) that govern a certain type of social and linguistic behaviour. As far as poetology is concerned, Lefevere is confident that authors in the canon preserve their hierarchic value even if translation is a rewriting process according to the new poetical doctrines that dominate the target language culture.

Toury strongly recommends that translation should be rule-governed because translation has a social function and observes social behaviour. He argues that norms govern all the stages of the translation process – the selection of the material to be translated, the choice of the strategy to be applied when translating the whole text or just parts of it reveal ideological affiliation "either to the original text, with the norms it has realized, or to the norms active in the target culture, or in that section of it which would host the end product" (Toury 1995: 201).

The author envisages a three-level model:

- *initial norms* – the translator focuses either on the source language and culture requirements or on the target language and culture requirements;
- *preliminary norms* – policing translation: the selection of the text to be translated and of the target language (sometimes the translation in the target language is mediated by another language – the case of Indian languages that resort to English);
- *operational norms* – referring to the parsing of the target language text and to the intra- or extra-textual glosses etc.

The identification of these types of norms in translation enhance the transition from the descriptive approach to the normative one, norms being considered to give rise to predictable behaviour. Toury (1995: 267-279) acknowledges two universal laws that govern translation:

- *the law of growing standardization* – translation will eliminate linguistic variations from the target language; in other words, the equivalence of linguistic variations in translation becomes a matter of accommodation or of equating socio-cultural connotations, especially when the target language text is not highly valued in the target language culture;
- *the law of interference* – there may be positive or negative interference according to the degree of tolerance that the target language culture manifests towards the source language culture.

Venuti (1995: 19-20) also discusses the nature of the control factors in literary translation and highlights that social institutions can promote or censor a text. He sees British and American translators as ethnocentric – their strategy is one of *domestication*, in which the source language cultural values are related to the ones pertaining to the target language system, by showing preference to the latter. Yet, the author advocates a *foreignizing strategy*³ – ethnodeviant – in which the cultural identity of the source text is preserved, the translator becomes visible and the readers are aware that they do not read the original.

Chestermann (1997/2000: 64-70) adds two more sets to Toury's model:

- *product or expectancy norms* – translation is reader-oriented, placed within the expectation scope and axiologically loaded;
- *professional norms* – they derive from the first type and fall into:
 - *the accountability norm* – the translator assumes full responsibility for the translation as product to be evaluated;
 - *the communication norm* – the translator is identified with a social actor and a mediating agent;
 - *the relation norm* – the translator should possess linguistic competence in order to achieve equivalence in translation.

Again, the translator, should develop sensitivity to the two linguistic systems and communicative competence in order to adequately function in the two languages and cultures. S/he should also promote networking and cooperation with monolingual specialists in different fields as s/he cannot rely solely on dictionaries, glossaries and workbenches.

Recent literature defines translation in more technical terms. The almost traditional pairing: the *bilingual* and the *bicultural* translator is complemented by technicalities deriving from re-focusing. Thus, Robinson (2003) envisages translation from a twofold perspective. From an inward looking point of view, translation means professionalization, i.e. the translator's active engagement in raising the status of the profession through institutional training, knowledge (specialized language) acquisition or versatility, development of an exploratory spirit and of his/her protocol of experience (encyclopaedic knowledge, real-world experience, immersion in different cultures), resource management, affiliation with professional organisations, networking (collaboration with peers and monolingual and bilingual specialists, which, however, do not possess translation competence), commitment to quality standards and to a code of conduct. According to Robinson (2003: 84) "translation for the professional translator is a constant learning cycle that moves through the stages of instinct (unfocused readiness), experience (engagement with the real world), and habit (a 'promptitude of action'), and, within experience, through the stages of abduction (guesswork), induction (pattern-building), and deduction (rules, laws, theories); the translator is at once a professional for whom complex mental processes have become second nature (and thus subliminal), and a learner who must constantly face and solve new problems in conscious analytical ways." From an outward looking point of view, translation is, eventually, a product or a commodity that must meet the receivers'/clients' requirements, including compliance with the agency policy (most translations are in-house ones), deadline observance, accommodation to particular needs and interests (the translated text may be a summary of the original text), globally equated to the loyalty factor.

Sales Salvador (2006) focuses on *documentary competence* or *information literacy* in translation – "the information retrieval and the evaluation of its quality, in the context of a multiplicity of formats", equating documentation to ethics. Documentary competence becomes a vital component of the 21st century translational know-how

³ For which he also uses the term *resistancy* (Venuti, 1995 : 305-306)

Pym (2006) speaks of the translator's *re-marketing* skills, beyond *localisation*, i.e. target language and culture appropriateness. Localisation is preceded by internationalisation, i.e. production of an apparently culture-free text. There is another serious problem arising with literary translation: literary texts use figurative language and the connotation of a lexeme is both axiological (collective linguistic evaluation) and subjective (individual). For instance, at the denotational level, *the rose* is "any of the wild or cultivated, usu. prickly-stemmed, pinnate-leaved, showy-flowered shrubs"; at the connotational level the rose is the symbol of beauty, of youth and of passion. Moreover, for the British it also means "The war of the two roses", i.e. the symbol of the royal house. Another example: *red* and *black* are equated at the denotational level via a different perception of the reality – the title of the novel *Le rouge et le noir* is translated in English by *Scarlet and Black*. At the connotational level, there are several similarities between French and English: *noir* and *black* refer firstly to the priest attire and secondly to death and mourning. *Rouge* represents for the French people the colour of blood (being directly equated to *red*) and the symbol of passion. Stendhal adds a further connotation to it: *rouge* stands for the colour of the military uniform and that is why two of the translators choose *scarlet* as an equivalent.

Literary translation involves two different languages and two different literary traditions, thus complying with two sets of linguistic and cultural requirements: the text in the canon in the source language and culture should be secured a similar position in the target language and culture. In this respect, Mounin (1963) speaks of *anisomorphisme*, arguing that literary translation is arbitrary since the two languages and cultures do not attach the same value to the signs they have at their disposal. At the same time, the translator takes into consideration the readership's expectations and there must be understanding of the fact that they are not ideal readers and should be assisted. Toury (1980) distinguishes between *reading as an original vs. reading as the original*. The first case refers to the possibility of preserving or reproducing the source language cultural values, the *kulturems* weighing heavily in the text economy and credibility. The second case implies naturalisation or cultural replica that allows the readership to enjoy and ratify the translation. The translation will read as the original and the readership will re-experience identity while the translation ensures continuity of the SLT (not betrayal). Translation proves to be a decision-making process where intentionality outranks the informative content.

If the translator uses the author-centered method, s/he will also try to render the impact that the original had upon him/herself, empathising with the author of the original. The controversial issue of reproducing form seems to give credit to those who believe that there is need to preserve the writer's idiolect so that the readership could appreciate the aesthetic value of the literary text. Form reproduction fosters content reproduction, keeping the spirit of the author alive. In this line of approach, we should not identify the translator with a mere technician as s/he virtually reiterates the process of creation.

The more *kulturems* or archaic terms a text contains, the less likely a translator is to fully equate the texts (except when the readership is acquainted to these terms or shows great affinity for the source language culture). *Kulturems* may be neutralised when not rendering local flavour or when they are not key terms. Hence, the desire to preserve the exotic flavour cannot alone justify the heavy transfers of *kulturems*.

If the translator uses the reader-oriented method, equivalence is easier to achieve. *Kulturems* are neutralised or provided a cultural equivalent and translation will be perceived as a simplified version of the original, a deviation on behalf of the apparent triumph of the reader-consumer.

Newmark (1988: 9) states that equivalence is achieved intuitively and that it depends more on the translator's loyalty than on the text-type: "Again, if the translator adopts larger units of translation, seeks dynamic equivalents, unearths the sub-text, the hidden agenda, the *vouloir-dire*, is pre-eminently target language-oriented, s/he is less circumscribed, more creative – and liberty in translation easily turns to licence."

To put it in a nutshell, borders are redefined, identities are reshaped and loyalties are divided.

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