Faithfulness in litterary translation

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Abstract

This communication is an attempt to shed light on the aspects concerning faithfulness in literary translation; since it is the most common criterion when evaluating a translation. We will also try to emphasize on the variety of opinions as to what it means to be faithful and to what should one be faithful. We will expose the theorists' opinions about foreignization and domestication, and the issues concerning faithfulness.

Keywords: *faithfulness, literary translation, foreignization, domestication, evaluating translation.*

الأمانة في الترجمة الأدبية

ملخص

هذه المداخلة عبارة عن محاولة لتسليط الضوء على الجوانب المتعلقة بالأمانة في الترجمة الأدبية، كونها المعيار الأكثر شيوعا عند تقييم ترجمة ما. سنحاول من خلالها التركيز على الآراء المختلفة عن مفهوم الأمانة وعما يجب على المترجم أن يكونا أمينا فيه. سنقوم بعرض آراء المنظرين عن التوطين والتغريب في الترجمة وعن المسائل المتعلقة بالأمانة.

الكلمات المفاتيح: الأمانة، الترجمة الأدبية، التغريب، التوطين، تقييم الترجمة.

Introduction

Translating literary texts can be more challenging than translating technical and scientific texts. This is due to the specificities of literature, and to its different genres. It has also a very close connection to the language used by authors. Every author has their own style related to their background and their personal experience.

It is also the case of translators, who have their own cultural background that allows them to use a specific style in rewriting the original text.

When translating literature, it is not about words we have to translate; neither is it about sentences nor phrases. Translating literature is more about translating ambiguities and arbitrariness since literary language abounds in them, and is highly connotative and subjective.

When it comes to readers, these latter can appreciate a translated literary text, whether it is poetry, prose or drama. They are not going to ask themselves questions about the original text, and they are not going to mandatory compare the original text with the translated one. They are just seeking to appreciate this one, not to evaluate or criticize it.

But, when specialists, scholars, researchers and intellectuals read translated works, they may do a comparison between the original and the translation. They can do it just by curiosity for some of them. But critics and all those who are specialized in this field will make an evaluation of the translation according to some criteria.

These criteria differ from one to another. Some will discuss the linguistic part, others can be interested in stylistic side… here in our paper we will attempt to shed light on one aspect that is considered as the most common criterion when evaluating a translation.

It is the biggest dilemma that a translator can face: *faithfulness*. Of course the translator have to be faithful; but to whom? To the author's culture? Or to the public's culture? Should he be faithful to the style of the source language? Or should he get fit to the target language's style? Should he keep the meaning or favor the intention? Is the impact an aspect to keep in mind while translating?

In our paper, we are aiming to answer these questions as much as possible, giving at first a general overview about literary texts characteristics. Then, we will try to find the specificities of literary translation according to these characteristics. After this, speaking about evaluating literary translation, we will enumerate some of the evaluation criteria in general, and then we will attempt to explain one important criterion, which is faithfulness, the

subject of our study. Here come the several opinions of theorists concerning faithfulness. A theoretical framework is explained: foreignization, domestication, effect and impact, meaning and intention… And then, as a conclusion, we will try to make ideas clearer and find a common ground and a balance between all points of view, in order to get a better understanding about faithfulness in literary translation.

1- General overview about literary texts and their characteristics :

A text is a coherent set of statements that forms a unity of meaning and has a communicative intent. The adjective *literary* is related to literature. So, a *literary text* is this set of statements that forms a unity of meaning and has a communicative intent and that has stylistic elements and significantly complex and detailed literary devices like metaphor, symbolism, chronology and psychological characterization.

These devices are significant since they form characteristics and specificities of literary texts, which are invented, imaginary and fictional. We can clarify a little bit more these characteristics.

In a literary text there is a predominance of poetic function over a referential function, since the authors shares their experience with readers and influence them making them change their moods and feeling. It is very rich in poetic resources like literary figures and all kind of images and metaphors.

It is ambiguous and clearly connotative. It is an open text as said by Umberto ECO; many interpretations are possible depending on the readers' background and personal literary context.It can be explained and described but not proven.

The vocabulary is precise and irreplaceable; a word cannot be replaced by another one because the expressive power changes even if the idea remains the same. And words are chosen by their euphony. The harmonic disposition of its elements, produced by a good combination of words gives it an emotional weight.

The reading of literary texts is free of charge, with no specific objectives and no use whatsoever. Literary texts are mostly works of fiction (especially narrative). That is to say, they relate events that did not really occur, but that come from the imagination and inventiveness of the author, who re-elaborates

reality according to his particular view of the world and his specific sensibilities.

So, to sum off the characteristics of literary texts we can say that they are poetic, ambiguous, connotative, harmonious, emotional, free of charge and fictional.

2- Criteria of evaluating literary translation

The specificities of the literary texts make the evaluation of their translation harder. Because of that, the critics have to be aware that there are many aspects to take into consideration.

One of the evaluation criteria is the poetic aspect; it appears in the style, literary figures and images. The translation is supposed to be as poetic as the original work.

The semantic and lexical aspects are also to take into account. The meaning should be rendered in adequate vocabulary.

Speaking about the meaning, it should be well understood by the translator. Since the literary text is ambiguous and connotative, the meaning may be difficult and implicit. The translator has to be highly qualified to translate literature.

There is one criterion that can bring together all the other criteria, it is faithfulness. Because, when any other criterion is respected, it means there is faithfulness to it.

But how can a translator be faithful? And to what? Or to whom?

3- Faithfulness in literary translation

Fidelity is the quality of being accurate, reliable, and exact. The concept of fidelity in translation or faithfulness in translation is the fact that the translated work is like the original but in another language.

We all agree that there should be faithfulness to the sense, the meaning, not just to the lexical nor linguistic aspect. We favor the essence and the soul of the literary work, its meaning with all its ambiguities.

Fidelity in translation is passing of the message from one language into another by producing the same effect in the other language, (in sense and in form), in a way that the reader of the translation would react exactly as the reader of the original text.

The relationship of fidelity between the original and its translation has always preoccupied translators, but the problem is,

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as far as translation is concerned, one should decide to whom, to what the supposed fidelity pertains. Is it fidelity to the proto-text, to the source culture, to the model of the reader, or to the receiving culture?

4- Theoretical framework

Many theorists thought about the concept of fidelity and faithfulness in translation. We can divide them into two groups: source-oriented translators and target-oriented translators.

Source text oriented or target oriented? That is the question. In fact, this has been the question for a long time. Both approaches have their advocates. While some assert that a translation is mainly a "copy" of the original and it should clearly be faithful to the structure, tone and linguistic microstructures of the source text, others maintain that the main function of a translation is to convey the information contained by the source text to a target readership so that is fully comprehensible to the latter.

Berman, Meschonnic, Schleiermacher and Walter Benjamin are advocates to the source language and the culture of departure, and therefore the literal translation to render all the cultural aspects of the source text.

Schleiermacher is well known as the philosopher who inspired translation theorists such as Berman and Venuti and who championed the so-called "source text-oriented approach."

Schleiermacher proposes two possibilities to bring writer and his reader closer − without forcing reader to leave bounds of his own native tongue behind him, to acquire as correct and complete an understanding and take as much pleasure in the writer as possible:

1. Either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible moves the reader towards him: Foreignization.

2. Or the translator leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer towards him: Domestication.

He further warns that any attempt to combine, would certainly result in unreliable results and will carry a danger that writer and reader might miss each other.

Foreignization: In foreignization, the translator tries to compensate the reader inability to understand the original language. He seeks to impart to the reader the same impression

that he himself received – through his knowledge of language as it was written.

During this process, he advises translator not to indulge in line by line translation as it fails to achieve spirit of the language as well as spirit of the writer himself.

Domestication: The translator tries to provide translation assuming how writer would have spoken with readers of another language.

Schleiermacher rejects this method as this would not only move the author from the translator: it would also be unreal to think that the author speaks the language of the reader.

Berman and Benjamin both prefer the concept of "translatability" (tradusibilité, Übersetzbarkeit) over the hackneyed concept of "linguistic translatability" (traductibilité). Here "translatability" refers to the question of whether a work is worthy of translation, whereas "linguistic translatability" refers to the empirical question of whether we can find an appropriate translator. They both think that translation goes beyond a mere communication means serving the reader ignorant of the original text; they think that translation lets the reader pay attention to the original text itself and pursues the mission of vivifying and extending the life of the original text. They think that a translation could reach the point where the original text was meant to reach.

Meschonnic shows how a poetics of translation can overcome the limits of a theory of sign based on the meaning/form dichotomy. As an alternative to this approach, which situates the poem and the translation in a logic of discontinuity, he proposes that language and translation he reconsidered from the viewpoint of the continuity of discourse and the unity of rhythm. Consequently, translation consists in translating not what words say, but what they do.

Nida, Evan-Zohar, Toury, Selescovich, Lederer and Fortunato Israel advocate the target language; they reject what is foreign to the target culture and advocate adaptation, dynamic equivalence and domestication.

Nida argued that there are two different types of equivalence, namely formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence tries to remain as close to the original text as possible,

without adding the translator`s ideas and thoughts into the translation. Thus, the more literal the translation is, the less danger there is of corrupting the original message. This is therefore much more of a word – for – word view of translation. The problem with this form of translation is that it assumes a moderate degree of familiarity with the subject matter on the part of the reader.

Dynamic equivalence is an approach to translation in which the original language is translated "thought for thought" rather than "word for word" as in formal equivalence. Dynamic equivalence involves taking each sentence (or thought) from the original text and rendering it into a sentence in the target language that conveys the same meaning, but does not necessarily use the exact phrasing or idioms of the original. The idea is to improve readability by rephrasing constructions that could be confusing when literally translated, but retain some faithfulness to the original text rather than creating a complete paraphrase. Because dynamic equivalence sacrifices some faithfulness to the original text to achieve a more natural translation, it is designed to be used when the readability of the translation is more important than preserving the original wording. For example, a novel could be translated with dynamic equivalence so that reads well, but in international diplomacy the exact original meaning may be very important, so formal equivalence would be more suited.

Selescovitch and Lederer established the interpretative theory of translation. According to it, the process of translation is divided into three stages: comprehension, deverbalization, and reformulation; furthermore, deverbalization assumes a vital role between both comprehension and reformulation.

The full interpretive process comes into play as soon as the translator or the interpreter adds not only his knowledge of language concepts to signs, but also his knowledge of the world. In that case, translating/interpreting conveys an intended meaning; in other words, the sense.

The translator, acting as a mediator between an author who wants to communicate and readers who want to understand him/her, operates in this area of overlap. The readers of the translation will bring their own cognitive complements to the translated text. The translator's rendering enables them to discover

the text superficially or deeply, just in the same way as readers of the original. Understanding a text is universal. The translator's understanding is only a specific case of the universal process.

Seleskovitch explained the concept of correspondence and equivalence using the metaphor of 'raisin bread'. If the original text is of various ingredients for making raisin bread, the interpreter or the translator will make the dough into the bread. The raisin is the part that can find a correspondence: the form remains unchanged. However, the rest of the dough, made of flour, sugar, salt and yeast, are all incorporated into the dough, and one can no longer separate the original ingredients. Yet, they are all in the dough. The mixed dough can be understood as the equivalent part.

When correspondence is possible, the interpreter/translator can move directly from understanding to re-expression. If not, the interpreter/translator retrieves what the original text is saying, that is the sense, and looks for its equivalence in the target language. The Theory of Sense is based on the fact that different languages use different ways of expressing similar content. The theory explains that interpreting and translation is not merely laying down what is said in the source text using corresponding words in the target text; that will result in a text that the target readers cannot understand. The theory emphasizes that the work of interpreting and translation is an extremely creative undertaking.

Even Zohar's analysis of norms in translation has shown that discrepancies between the source and the target texts can be explained as the result of actions governed by domestic norms.

Even-Zohar's systemic approach has transformed Translation studies from a marginal philological specialty to a focus of inter-culture research. His article, "The Position of Translated Literature", is widely quoted. His polysystem theory has opened many avenues to researchers in translation studies.

In Even-Zohar's terms, a 'polysystem' is multidimensional and able to accommodate taxonomies established in the realm of literature (the division between high and low literature), translation (the division between translation and non-translation) and social relationships (the division between dominant and dominated social groups).

His main research is on the theory of translation and descriptive translation studies, with emphasis on the history of the Hebrew translation of the Bible to the present.

According to Toury, there are prescriptive and descriptive studies. Prescriptive approaches aim to formulate rules that should be followed by anyone who produces a text of a given type. They are focused on finding the most optimal or correct solutions. Descriptive approaches are about looking into existing texts and describing the rules they seem to follow.

He came up with the term "translation norms", as hidden rules followed by the majority discovered by descriptive observation of actual translation. They are not understood as prescriptive rules but as norms specific to a context. Therefore, norms change with time and culture, so translation re-visits the same problem over and over again.

Conclusion

Evaluation constitutes an important aspect of practical literary translation. It brings into focus the theories of linguistic relativity and the language universals, which posits that human languages have more things in common than they have differences by virtue of being vehicles of human communication.

As a conclusion concerning fidelity or faithfulness in literary translation we can observe that between source-oriented and target-oriented the translation is done through several processes: transliteration, dynamic equivalence, adaptation...

Advocates of domestication have their opinions and convictions. They would rather resort to equivalence or adaptation… in order that the text fits to the target culture.

Advocates of foreignization chose to import the author's universe, the writer's culture to the minds of readers in target language. They keep all the aspects of the source work, ant render it in order that new readers understand and learn about the writer's universe and culture.

So here faithfulness is seen differently from one to another. Source-oriented are obviously faithful to the source language and culture. They advocate foreignization.

While the target-oriented translators are those who claim fidelity to the readers' culture. Domestication is their method and the approach they adopt.

As a researcher in translation, we think that we must do a choice while translating literature. We cannot be both source/target-oriented.

The adequate choice in our personal point of view is to be source-oriented. In purpose to widen the readers' knowledge, especially in our era, it is so benefic to learn more about the other. And how can all of us learn if we –translators- adopt the other's culture to ours, if we bury the knowledge that can give us a large culture.

We advocate foreignization, because thanks to it we can teach to others our culture and make it travel all around the world, as we can learn about the others.

So for us, the answer to the question: to whom the translators should be faithful? Is that they ought to swear fidelity to the source culture, sense and language. Because it is the duty of the translator to export this culture wide world.

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