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Re-creating Literary Texts

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Abstract

A translator must always be resourceful in terms of vocabulary and syntactic structures. As for creativity in literary translation, we believe that creativity and translation remain inseparable, that is, translation itself is a creative process. The translation is not simply a transformation of an original text into a literal equivalent, but must successfully convey the overall meaning of the original, including the cultural meaning. Fundamental questions are asked.

- What about the question of the translatability of the original style?
- Should a translation have the style of the translator?
- Can we say that the original literary style is untranslatable?

Translation depends on the theoretical knowledge and the practical skill of the translator, a negotiation where the meanings are not translated, but the messages. Indeed, the act of translation goes well beyond simple linguistic transcoding; it is in fact an act of interlinguistic communication. Therefore, the task of the translator connects disciplines and cultures and makes an essential contribution to literature and language on an international scale.

Mots clés :

Traduction, négociation, créativité, Texte littéraire

Résumé

Un traducteur doit toujours être ingénieux en termes de vocabulaire et de structures syntaxiques. Quant à la créativité dans la traduction littéraire, nous pensons que la créativité et la traduction restent inséparables, c'est-à-dire que la traduction elle-même est un processus créatif. La traduction n'est pas simplement une transformation d'un texte original en un équivalent littéral, mais doit transmettre avec succès le sens global de l'original, y compris le sens culturel. Des questions fondamentales sont posées.

- Qu'en est-il de la question de la traduisibilité du style original ?
- Une traduction doit-elle posséder le style du traducteur ?
- Peut-on dire que le style littéraire original est intraduisible ?

La traduction dépend des connaissances théoriques et de l'habileté pratique du traducteur, une négociation où les significations ne sont pas traduites, mais les messages. En effet, l'acte de traduction va bien au-delà d'un simple transcodage linguistique ; il s'agit en fait d'un acte de communication interlinguistique. Par conséquent, la tâche du traducteur relie les disciplines et les cultures et apporte une contribution essentielle à la littérature et à la langue à l'échelle internationale.

We are not translators or experts in the field of translation, but as EFL teachers we do think that the role of translation in the EFL classroom has and will continue to be a hotly debated issue, but today at least, it is not our concern. Yet, we do agree with the fact that a translator should always be resourceful in terms of vocabulary and syntactic structures. As to creativity in literary translation, we think that creativity and translating remain inseparable, i.e., Translation itself is a creative process.

Thus, translation is not simply a transformation of an original text into a literal equivalent, but must successfully convey the overall meaning of the original, including cultural meaning. Probably the problem is more difficult for poetry as compare to prose. Translations can vary, and j Style in writing, as in any other means of expression, is the author's thumbprint. Each writer has a talent for perceiving the movement of life and a faculty to describe it. S/he is bound to have been influenced by other's writings, but influences are absorbed and transmuted. Influences consist of acquisitions, affected by tastes and preferences, upbringing and milieu, instinctive selection. Style becomes, thus, the fruitful result of reading, writing, listening, selection, appropriation and rejection. There is no such a thing as a writer who

escapes being influenced, of a *pure* style. Thus, language creates and shapes one's conceptions about life and oneself and, different literary works have thus different styles.

Here are the fundamental questionings:

- What about the question of translatability of the original style?
- Should a translation possess the style of the translator?
- Can we say that the original literary style is untranslatable?

Certainly, the question of translatability is worth discussing, though no real answer can be given. It is really a hard task to accomplish. Style can never go without language. Wording means choice of words and rhetorical devices. In fact, proper words in proper places define a style. So, the quality of a translation has nothing to do with the original work or with the original writer, rather, it depends on the theoretical knowledge and practical skill of the translator, a *negotiation* where meanings are not translated, but messages.

Is translation an art of reproduction and recreation? Indeed, translation is not only a science, a science with its own peculiar laws and methods, but rather an art of reproduction and re-creation. Translators are also expected to be experts in literature, have a *knack* for creative writing and be aware of existing translations of the text they are working on. Just as the ultimate function of art is aesthetic, so is the function of literature and thus the translated piece should have the aesthetic value first and foremost. At this level, we would like to refer to Vermeer when he claims that translation is more of an intuitive process than an empirical one, since there are no scientific rules to assess the correctness of a given translation. In other words, there are no precise facts which can be used to assess whether a translation is perfect or not. This situation led him to assert that:" there is no science of translating, but a science of translation" (Vermeer 1987:25) udging translations is like judging works in their original language.

Yet, it is a golden rule that a translation must be faithful to the original work but translating is still a creative process. We have different versions in the target language of the same works, that each translator creates something original that is specially made to *speak* to a particular audience. So, is translation possible, or is it an impossible exercise?

As an illustration of this ongoing debate, the following quotation provides ample evidence: "Translation is of course an impossible task. No version of any sentence in one language can possibly capture the semantic richness, phonic structure, syntactic, form and connotative allusiveness of a sentence in another language. ('Petrey in Rose 1984:87).

Certainly, "translation is not the transcoding of words or sentences from one language to another, but a complex form of action, whereby someone provides information on a text (source language material) in a new situation and under changed functional, cultural and linguistic conditions, preserving formal aspects as closely as possible" (Snell-Hornby in Bassnett and Lefèvre 1990:82)

Indeed, the act of translation goes far beyond a merely linguistic transcoding; it is in fact an act of interlingual communication. But, although it is true that a very considerable literature exists on the theoretical aspects of the subject and manuals and course books abound, little research has been undertaken with the aim of uncovering the strategies employed by translators in resolving interlingual difficulties.

More often than not the emphasis is on the product rather than on the process; on the finished works rather than on the way in which they have been achieved. The translation process is being seen increasingly in terms of what it is intended to achieve in terms of the target culture.

It is significant that a writer of Delisle's reputation should say that: translation consists in expressing not signs but concepts, ideas: "Traduire consiste à exprimer non les signes, mais des concepts des idées" (Delisle 1980: 72).

The same author, in his 1994 manual goes on to tackle the very real problem of polysemy, criticizing some translators who translate the English word problem by *problème* while in fact, depending on the context, the word can be translated into about 94 various ways. As more than one specialist in terminology has readily admitted, too much focus on this particular field can actually undermine translator training, tempting students to look only for terminological equivalents and translate without considering units of meaning (Sager, 1994).

Undoubtedly, we would not question the view that practice is essential in developing and refining translation skills. But, we would add, however, that a heightened sensitivity to the kinds of problems we have been discussing could do much to speed up this learning process, bringing nearer the day when the translator will be able to work on his own. The translator's task bridges disciplines and cultures and makes an essential contribution to literature and language on an international scale.

Here are some illustrations:

Literary translation has allowed witnessing the emergence of Feminine literature, notably in India. It is not surprising, then, that Feminine literature deals with a wide range of genres from English translations of important fictional writings by women from different Indian languages to particular women voices which redefine issues of women's lives from traditional subservient roles assigned to them which stemmed from Hindu myths to a strong commitment to women's rights and feminist activism. e.g.: In India: *Countries of Goodbyes* by Mridula Grag was translated from Hindi to English by Manisha Chaundhry (2003).

Recollections (1986) and *Our Existence* (1986), respectively by Shantabai and Baby Kamble were published at home, thanks to Subventions of the Commission for the Culture and Literature of the State in home languages (Marathi) and translated into French by Guy Poitevin (1991) entitled *Parole de femme intouchable* with La Fondation pour le Progrès de l'Homme.

Even in Pakistan women's writings such as *So That You Can know Me,* an anthology of Pakistani women writers, were translated from Punjabi, Pushto,

Seraiki, Sindhi and Urdu by Yasmin Hameed and Asif Aslam Farrukhi (1997), through UNESCO's Funds. Besides, Mridula Grag stands really apart from the mainstream contemporary Hindi literature for a basic reason, i.e. for her audacious themes. English translation by Manisha Chaudhry of her 1996 best seller *Kathgulab* gives non Hindi readers access to her masterpiece and relevance to today's literary world. Like Roy, she was arrested for *obscene* writing in Delhi but honoured with the 2001 Hellman Hammett Award for courageous writing *Chittacobra* (1979) by the New York Based Human Rights Watch. Perhaps that is the key to Grag's success as a writer whether in Hindi or in translation

Indeed, translation is not an original product, but it opens a literary system to transformation and subversion. The English version of Indian writing could be highlighted by media and publishers, particularly giving worldly acclaim. Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1913), a collection of partly translated poems conferred the writer the Nobel Prize for Literature, as well as established him as an international figure whose reputation is also outside the Bengali. One of the key issues raised in this context is the superiority or inferiority of Indian writing in English as compared to the literary production in the various languages of India. Consequential key concepts emerge, particularly superficial / authentic, imitative / creative, shallow / deep, elitist / parochial, critical / uncritical. It is probably a new celebration of the hegemony of the foreign, First World, colonizer's language:

e.g.: Women Publishing as Kali is another woman enterprise and has been providing from 1984 a viable publishing mouthpiece to Indian feminism. Kali's list of authors involves well-known writers like Radha Kumar, Vandana Sliva and Maria Mies, and so on, as well as English translations of outstanding fictional writings by women from various Indian languages.

A more recent related plea for appropriate recognition for the work of literary translators has recently been presented by a distinguished literary translator and academic spokesman for literary translators, Professor Brian Nelson, in his review essay, 'The Great Impersonators' (*The Australian Literary Review*, 3 November 2010). Emeritus Professor Nelson, who has translated several works by Emile Zola and is currently the President of the Australian Association for Literary Translation, deplores public misunderstanding and underestimation of the input of the literary translator.

To conclude with, we have to recognize how much translations can vary, find out what each one offers, and pick one that seems to come closest to what we are seeking. And yet, different titles and versions of the same novel are prevailing and updated. Judging translations is like judging works in their original language. There is no one standard of excellence to which all works can be compared. It becomes a very subjective process: some of us feel certain things we value from some works that we do not have from others, and so we *like* those works.

Over time certain works are accepted as being valued by more readers more than other works. Similarly, with translations, particular efforts become known as classics over time. And, as with original works, translations can go in and out of

fashion over the years. The popularity of particular translations is not always dependent on how well they reflect the original work:
e.g. the King James version of the Bible, for instance, in its majestic English style of the early seventeenth century reflects the speech of the ancients who wrote the books in Hebrew and Greek. There is little doubt that how the original authors thought—their meaning—was also subtly changed in that translation. And yet the King James Bible has been an acknowledged classic in the English-speaking world for four centuries[1]. Thus, literary translation implies the translation of all genres of literature, which include prose, drama and poetry. But, what about Structural Translations between literature and music? An impressive example of a translation of a specific piece of music into literature can be found in

- Richard Powers' novel *The Gold Bug Variations* (The novel intertwines the discovery of the chemical structure of DNA with the musicality of Johann Sebastian Bach's harpsichord composition, the Goldberg Variations (awarded the 2006 National Book Award for his latest novel *The Echo Maker*).

Most of the techniques for translating literature into music involve a double translation-translating literature into visual art (graphic file)[2] then translating this visual art into music (sound file)[3].

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[1] The Geneva Bible (1599), the James Bible (1611), the English Revised Version (1881).
[2] Man of La Mancha is a 1972 film version and comedy of the Miguel de Cervantes seventeenth century masterpiece Don Quixote.
[3] (2) Swan Lake is a ballet, first opera 20, by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, composed 1875–1876. Swan Lake (1989) is a children's novel written by Mark Helprin and illustrated by Chris van Allsburg.

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