



Theoretical Concepts of Training Literary Translators

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Abstract

With the growing number of academic translation programs worldwide, there have been many systematic attempts toward a methodological approach to teaching literary translation. The present paper attempts to propose a teaching model toward literary translation that would contribute to students' building a strong theoretical basis on the translation phenomenon. The research methodology employed is theoretical exploration, focusing on concepts such as carnivalism, the reading and interpretation stages in literary translation, prospective and retrospective seeing in literature. The fundamental conclusion drawn is that a theoretical approach to literary translation is intricately connected to the act of literature translation.

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1. *Introduction*

Despite the fact that definitions of literary translation are not as clear-cut as we tend to believe, the essential consideration in literary translation is that “a translator always translates whole situations, words and pictures, as well as their different readers, writers, and users in a specific time, place, and culture” (Oittinen, 1996, p. 145). In this sense, Jünke (2023, p. 1280) characterizes literary translation as “both an interlingual translation, that is the rephrasing of a literary text in another language, and in a broader and more metaphorical sense as transfer, transmission and relocation across different kinds of spatial and temporal borders”.

Literary translation is usually distinguished from other forms of specialized translation such as technical, legal or economical in the sense that the latter are “pragmatic” translations performing a specific purpose and function such as the informative or operative function. In addition, literary texts are distinct from other texts “by virtue of their general, as opposed to specialised, vocabulary or terminology” (Woodsworth, 2002, p. 131). More precisely, literary translation is defined, according to Delabastita, as “the rendering of originals in which translators are expected to preserve or recreate the aesthetic intentions or effects that may be perceived in the source text” (2011, p. 69). The above definition describes a translation product

that presupposes the maintenance of both the content of the source text and its artistic style and value. As far as its function is concerned, it is mainly expressive by allowing recipients to enjoy various literary works from all parts of the world and be familiarized with the author’s values which reflect his origin’s culture and tradition (Khushbakova, 2021, p. 1893). However, its educational function should not be underestimated by assisting the target readership “in realizing the value of fostering diversity and protecting cultural heritage”. (Ali Abdul-Rahman, 2023, p. 386). Indeed, the study of literary translation has enriched our worldwide cultural legacy and aided in bridging gaps between various cultures by fostering cross-cultural communication and advancing literary traditions.

Literary translation is more complex and creative in comparison to other types of translation since it often poses translation problems related to the linguistic, textual, cultural, and pragmatic dimension of texts. Zhang (2016, p. 512) refers to two main characteristics that differentiate it from other types of specialised translation: firstly, each literary text has its own unique style created by the author of the original and in this sense the role of the translator is to convey the original style to the target text readers; secondly, literary translation makes up a creative activity that bears strong artistic and personality features. This implies that the translator often should

be “inventive in order to be faithful” (Karjagdiu & Mrasori, 2021, p. 2337).

Literary texts entail specific features that are difficult to translate. More precisely, they contain textual and contextual aspects that require distinct skills such as accurate philological knowledge, intellectual preparation, creativity and artistic talent in order to achieve “literariness” in the target version. According to Ziaul Haque (Abdullayeva Bayrambay qizi, 2020, p. 8), a literary translator must possess several different skills to translate feelings, cultural elements, humor and other sensitive components of literary work. The contextual aspect of literary translation has been stressed by Sun (2022, p. 30) who observes that cross-cultural discourse coexists with context in literary texts, and, therefore, literary translation is both transformed and limited by contextual parameters.

Finally, literary translation involves a variety of text-types that call for specific subcompetences and special training: in rendering poetry it is important to investigate rhyme, rhythm and sound matters; in rendering comics, the graphic conventions; speakability is among the fundamental factors in translating stage texts, while in translating novels translators are asked to resolve problems imposed by matters such as style, dialect, connotations, metaphors as well as the ideological parametre of literary texts. However, the

difficulties that concern literary translation eventually do not differ from those related to other types of translation. As Oittinen observes (1996, p. 145), all kinds of translation involve common matters such as intention and purpose, reading and comprehension issues, culture and personal opinions.

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2. The role of theory to teaching literary translation

There is an ongoing debate regarding the role of theory to literary translation which is partly due to the fact that some tutors are practitioners who doubt the contribution of theory to the act of translating considering that only flair, creativity and practice are enough for translating literary texts (Barcsák, 1996, p. 175). Academics are in favour of a strong theoretical background in translation that would make a good translator of literature (Woodsworth, 2002; Ulrych, 1995). Above all, translation theories have instructive function to translation practice and translators who have acquired theoretical knowledge find themselves in a privileged position. In particular, academically-trained translators develop the necessary research skills in

order to be versed in literary analysis and interpretation of the text to be translated. The most important privilege is that they learn to devote considerable time to preliminary preparation, investigate aspects of the author's cultural background as well as assess the elusive question of style.

Academic knowledge adds to students' sensitivity to language by learning about the in-depth process of interpretation as individual readers of the source-text. In addition, by comparing different test-types students practise in identifying key factors in the act of translating such as the receiver and sender, the purpose of text and how these factors are interrelated in various contexts. As writers of literary texts in the target language, they also learn how to "polish texts and give them the finishing touch" (Oittinen, 1996, p. 145). Finally, once equipped with theoretical knowledge, the future literary translator "is ready to embark on the great adventure" (Pontiero, 1992, p. 302).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 The reading and understanding process in translating literary texts

This study has conducted bibliographic research aiming to investigate main theoretical approaches to teaching literary translation and propose a didactic model that would provide students with fundamental theoretical knowledge in

order to develop a wide range of subcompetences for handling successfully literary texts that undoubtedly demand specific skills and training.

The reading concept has been a key-term in the act of translating entailing various reading experiences such as the reading experience of the translator who functions as the basis of the translating process and the reading experience of future readers who act as recipients of the final product. Within this framework, the translator makes up a specific reader, analytical and emotional, who conveys his individual reading experience to other readers being in a continuous interaction with different agents involved in translation such as the source text writer, the publisher and the target readership (Oittinen, 1996).

Regarding the nature of reading in the process of translation, Bakhtin (1990) characterizes it as "dialogic". According to his approach, each word, language and culture are in a continuous dialogue with another word, language and culture. More specifically, a word acquires several different meanings in a dialogic relationship with another word; on the contrary; a word that is detached from its context bears no meaning at all.

The dialogic nature of reading is closely related to Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia". In Bakhtin's words: "at any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions – social,

historical, meteorological, physiological – that will ensure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions” (1987, p. 202). What is implied is that reading involves active understanding which means assimilating the text to be understood into a new conceptual system where readers seek answers. Within this framework, each text is continuously being given new meaning both by new readers and by the same readers in new contexts.

3.2 The interpretation process in literary translation

Although students of translation who are at the initial stage of their training tend to consider that translators are passive observers of the source text aiming towards an objective interpretation which is then reflected to the translated text (Orel, 1996), interpretation is by far a complicated concept that implies a particular way of understanding a text. Orel introduces the notion of “interpretational differences” that are distinguished into three main types (1996, pp. 132-133).

First of all, interpretational differences in the translation process can take the form of linguistic or factual mistakes when the hermeneutical stage has not been successfully completed. The analysis of such differences could be linguistically and pedagogically inappropriate since this type of misinterpretation is usually investigated

in the learning process of error analysis and it is related to the students’ weakness to perform adequately within a certain system of interpretation.

Interpretational differences in the translation process also occur due to several different ways of comprehending a text and to different values, attitudes and expectations that have been established between the source and the target text recipients. In order to translate a work of art, various components of the vocabulary of the language, such as synonyms and antonyms, terminology, expressions and idioms as well as matters related to pronunciation should be interpreted according to the norms, features and forms of the target language and culture (Toshtemirova, 2023, p. 50). In addition, the translator’s decisions concerning interpretational matters are taken by considering both the role of the intended reader and his own interpretation skills.

Finally, interpretational differences are related to the translator’s attempt to reproduce the source author’s style in the target text which could almost reach the impossibility of the quest for equivalence. In many cases, the translator can achieve a satisfactory rendition, although he can rarely reach a fully identical interpretation. Such interpretational differences are difficult to identify since they mainly involve the translator’s integrated

perception of the author's work as an indivisible entity.

3.3 The translator's responsibility: prospective and retrospective seeing

In the process of comprehending both the source text author and the needs of future readers, the translator is involved into a series of intersubjective relationships that are characterized by a sense of responsibility described by Orel in terms of the distinction between "prospective seeing" (prospection) and "retrospective seeing" (retrospection) (1996, pp. 133-136):

By considering the target text reader's needs, the translator uses prospective seeing, whereas, by focusing on the source text author's style he uses retrospective seeing. In teaching literary translation, when applying prospective seeing students are asked to function as the target readers by comparing the original to the translated text. They are called upon to identify the differences in interpretation between that of the intended readers and their own interpretation as actual readers and such exercise will help them to realise that there will always be a discrepancy between these two types of interpretation.

On the contrary, in retrospective seeing, students are expected to lay emphasis on the author of the original text, and more specifically, on his personal style while the effect of retrospective seeing on the

practice of translation depends on the extent to which they are familiar with the author's individual style of writing. In case students are aware of the source author's style, they consider him as the ideal recipient of their translation by reproducing the style that they believe is characteristic of him. The positive acceptance of translation often depends on the readers' level of bilingualism and biculturalism and the more they are familiar with the source author's identity, the less difficult it is for the translator to produce an acceptable translation product.

Both approaches help students to realize that the concepts of perfect translation and complete equivalence do not actually exist in practice as well as to be aware of the interpretation difficulties they are likely to encounter in the act of translating. They also contribute to developing students' awareness of their responsibilities toward the source text author and the intended readers and, thus, to translating in a more conscious manner right from the initial stage of their training.

3.4 The concept of Carnivalism in literary translation

A theoretical notion that could be integrated in teaching literary translation is Bakhtin's concept of carnivalism that he describes as a typical culture of laughter which ridicules everything that is official, abstract and stable. In literature, carnivalism belongs, "to the low genres,

showing the life of private individuals and the inferior social level” (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 67).

Introducing the concept of carnivalism offers a new perspective on teaching literary translation which implies that in order for translators to give life to texts, they need to approach them closely and in order to achieve this they need to be fearless. Therefore, translation is seen as a carnivalistic action that functions as a constant battle against the fear of the original. Similarly, translation is seen as a carnivalistic action because of its physical nature just like carnivalism makes up a bodily and dialogic activity. What Bakhtin stresses is the fact that through the notion of carnivalism, the translator loses the “fear, mystic terror and guilt” that he may feel toward the original text by acknowledging the value of the “other”, that is, the foreign elements of the original text.

By introducing the concept of carnivalism in teaching literary translation, students learn to approach the original text closely and play an active role in understanding it. Such an approach helps them to possess less fear in the process of translating by first diving into the original and reading it carefully and then moving away from it. Oittinen (1996, pp. 150-151), describes the following two stages in teaching literary translation: during the first stage, students tend to read carefully the original given

and show a natural fear of it. IN the second stage, they try to transfer the source text into the target text by encountering translation difficulties and experiencing intense frustration. By adopting the theoretical approach of carnivalism translation students learn to be on a continuous dialogue with the source text by recognizing the wide range of factors involved in each translation situation.

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4. The critique of translation

The evaluation of the translated product could be used as a pedagogical tool in teaching literary translation. As participants in the learning process, students are asked first to translate literary texts and then to assess the work of their classmates. By comparing several versions

of the same text, trainees become aware of alternative strategies in order to handle translation problems and they further develop their critical skills by identifying those techniques which better work in a given context (Leonardi, 2024, p. 97).

Moreover, the evaluation process would help trainees to focus on certain aspects of the source text that ask for specific attention such as (Zhang, 2016, p. 514):

a. the title: students should consider intensively the title of the literary text, not only regarding its linguistic function but also its role in transferring the message of the text. In criticizing the translation of a literary text, they should assess the translated title and the extent to which it performs the function that has already been specified during the analysis stage of the source text.

b. the so-called “crucial words and phrases”: students should identify specific words and phrases that are repeatedly used by the author of the original text so that they can highlight either a personality trait of a main character or plot development. During the next stage, they should examine how these crucial lexical units have been rendered in the target text.

c. genre and writing style of the text: different genres of texts possess their own writing conventions and the writer’s style is often characteristic of these conventions. Students evaluate how the translator has

handled the question of style in the target text and whether he has respected the writing conventions of different text types.

d. cultural differences: students analyse the cultural parameters in the source text and how culture-specific words and concepts have been rendered in the translated text since, according to Mengyuan (2024, p. 29), one of the main difficulties involved in translating literary texts is successful rendering of the cultural dimension of the assigned text.

e. overall treatment of the source text: through the process of evaluation students learn to regard the translated text as a whole new piece of work which, however, should have the same effect on the target readership as the effect that the source text creates on the source-text readers.

5. Toward a descriptive approach to teaching literary translation

The growth of the descriptive branch in Translation Studies has been one of the major developments in the last decades aiming to an in-depth exploration of the historical, social, cultural and ideological factors that have influenced the translation phenomenon in different communities. Cheung (1996) makes an important proposal into the teaching of literary translation that is based on a descriptive translation theory, that was initially suggested by Toury (1980), the main idea of which is summarised as follows:

Since the notion of translation rests upon the concept of “equivalence”, that is, the existence of some relationship between the two messages involved, the source message and the target message, the principal question to be raised is not whether the two texts are equivalent, but to what degree and levels they show equivalence. (Toury, 1980, p. 89).

Cheung (1996) adopts a teaching model for literary translation that is made up of three stages based on the three-stage operation method proposed by Toury (1980) which is applicable not only for the analysis process of the source text but also for target text evaluation. The three stages are described as such (1996, pp. 156-159):

1. a cursory reading of the translation in order to form an initial evaluation of the way the target language structure is used.

2. an in-depth analysis of problematic areas in the original text and their treatment in the target text focusing on the following points:

- a. the title of the target text and whether it fulfills not simply its main linguistic function but also whether it manages both to convey the message of the text and draw the reader's attention to a certain character of the literary text.

- b. significant words and phrases which are used repeatedly by the source text writer in order to stress an important feature of a

character or to develop the plot of the source text story. Such lexical items can take on a strong ideological connotation when they repeatedly appear in a literary text.

c. Another main question that is raised regards identifying the central theme of the novel. A starting point for discussion is that most novels deal with “change” such as change in the person’s character, change in vision of life and change in attitudes. The notion of “change” remains an invariant revealed by the technique of “contrast”, that involves the description of the moments of “before” and “after”. Through the analysis of the writer’s use of the contrast technique, the moments of “change” can be identified as well as their contribution to the thematic development of the literary text.

d. the writer’s writing style and a related analysis regarding the ways in which his stylistic traits are depicted in the translated text. Different genres of novels are characterized by different writing conventions and a writer’s style can usually be described as typical of such conventions.

e. the status and contribution of literary translation in the community of the target culture as well as the specific historical, political and ideological factors that affect the methodological approach to literary translation.

3. At this stage, translation students are reminded that the conclusions reached at stage two of their training should be compared to those reached at stage one so that they can draw a general conclusion. If the translator considers that the conclusions reached in both stages coincide, then evaluation is considered to be successful. Otherwise, the translator has to identify the differences between the two stages in order to decide whether further research is required on the historical conditions for the production of the translated text.

Overall, the teaching model lays emphasis on the need for comprehensive research in the analysis stage of the source text and the role of the evaluation process as a learning activity that would help students realize that the assessment criteria of the translation product are not clear-cut and, consequently, the acceptance of universal features for the evaluation is actually a utopia. The most important benefit for students is that they are encouraged, first, to sensitize on the multidimensional nature of the translation phenomenon and, then, to reconsider the entire act of translating.

6. Results

The disciplines of Literary and Translation Studies are developing significantly and therefore, as Roig-Sanz and Meylaerts point out (2018, p. 7), literary and translation scholars need to become familiar with modern theoretical

approaches which derive from related disciplines such as cultural studies, sociology, anthropology and philosophy. The present study has shown the strong interrelationship between Literary Studies and Translation Studies that calls for a comprehensive model of teaching literary translation where translation theory is dependent upon literary theory. Within this framework, literary theory should be integrated into literary translation courses as a systematic study of the nature of literary text and of the methods of literary analysis. The theoretical component of literary translation courses should not be restricted to abstract and generalised ideas and notions about translation but it should be oriented toward a methodological approach to literary text analysis and interpretation. In that sense, it should aim to assist the individual translator both by motivating him to reflect upon the distinct features of literary translation and to propose points of agreement among theoreticians on common translation problems.

7. CONCLUSION

The present paper has attempted to raise questions related to teaching literary translation and to promote informed dialogue to practitioners and researchers that would stimulate further investigation in the field of literary translation. A systematic theoretical approach to teaching literary translation is proposed in

order to help trainees acquire knowledge in fundamental theoretical concepts of translation and develop a wide range of the necessary subcompetences for translating literature.

The main conclusion is that the overall purpose of teaching literary translation should be to improve students' methodological ability toward the reading, understanding and interpretation process in approaching literary texts. The contribution of theory in translating literature involves helping the translator first to interpret the text and then to reconstruct it on a textual level (Zhan, 2020, p. 130). The main goal of a literary translation course thus should be to sensitize them on the practical applications of theory since one of the main difficulties that teachers may encounter is related to students' negative attitude toward the contribution of a theoretical approach to the act of translating. It should also aim at developing students' awareness regarding their social responsibilities and this would certainly further reinforce their self-image as professionals in their working environment.

The proposed teaching model is based on a descriptive approach to translation where the main question to be raised in translating literary texts is not whether the two texts are equivalent, but to what extent and what type of equivalence can be achieved between the source and the target

text. Paronyan (2024) stresses the importance of pragmatic equivalence in literary translation making up a strong argument that literary translation is actually a cultural entity on its own (p. 170). Within this framework, students are introduced to fundamental theoretical concepts that would help them to resolve certain difficulties related to the notion of equivalence in literature translation. The ultimate goal is to make trainees realise that each translation is unique by reflecting not only the source text, but also the translator's own personal traits as well as the norms and social rules within specific cultures.

A literary translation course is recommended designed in two levels: a first level, aiming to introduce the theoretical thinking in literary translation in a broad manner and a second level, aiming to bridge the traditional gap between the pure theoretical approach and the act of translating by exposing students to the challenges involved in translating literature. Such a course type would be structured around substantial practice based on a strong theoretical and historical foundation in order to achieve the fruitful interaction between the academic nature of literary translation and its professional dimension. Thus, literary translation will become "far less elitist, more comprehensive and more sensitive to broader cultural, social and political contexts" (Delabastita, 2010, p. 203).

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