

# Literary Translation and Interculturality

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**Abstract**—The article attempts to discuss translators' issues while transferring a source text into a foreign language and culture. The result of this clash, i.e. interculturality, is discussed. The translator's strategies, such as domestication and foreignizing, and necessary choices, which have to be made to achieve these strategies, e.g. glossing, commenting, writing forewords, are analyzed.

**Keywords**—acculturation, domestication, foreignizing, interculturality, literary translation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Literary translation has always been very important, but modern literary translation and practices have an additional vital task, i.e. intercultural transfer. A good literary translation can offer readers an insight into foreign cultures. A translator has a choice between familiarizing readers with foreign elements or domesticate them and rob readers of a new and educating experience. The latter can be used a means of manipulation.

## II. LITERARY TRANSLATION

Literary translation, which is the done by literary translators, is translating poetry, prose, and drama. It includes translating works with higher aesthetic value and so called trivial literature Literary works with little or no aesthetic functions.

Translation has always been very important, but the awareness of the translator's role has changed over the years. Lefevere (1995) calls a modern translator a scholar translator since they need to know source and target languages, source and target cultures, historic and sociologic backgrounds etc. Translation today is seen as a transfer of a text from one culture to another. That consequently results in a clash between two cultures, which is defined as interculturality. Modern translation science in is interested in forms and results of interculturality from the viewpoint of an individual, a whole society and issues and misunderstandings, which arise from the intercultural contact.

A translator is a bridge between two cultures, an agent, who tries to accommodate a source culture to a reader of a target text. At this point so called practices (practical part of translating) and translation theory clash. The latter

more and more often focuses on intercultural transmission and less and less on linguistic analysis as such.

Meta Grosman, a Slovene linguist, defines intercultural reading / translating as every reader's contact with artistic works from other cultures and languages. Simultaneously a clash between a source and target cultures occurs, which results in so called intercultural communication. Grosman claims that the circumstances of intercultural communication differ from other types of communication, because it includes two cultures and mostly two languages, i.e. two different codes for two different texts.

Literary translation is the most usual form of intercultural transfer of literature in intercultural position. Some translation theorists (Venuti, Grosman etc.) claim that the translation even has a more important role than the source text, since the latter reaches only the readers in a source culture, while the translation outgrows the limits of the source language and culture and acts as a medium of intercultural communication. The translation is more and more often seen as an individual artistic work and not as a subordinate to the original. Thus the translator's job is to place the source text into a different literary system and changed socio-cultural position.

Lefevere (1992: 89) claims that the target culture has an important role in the way of translating. Thus the translator must necessarily be aware of the function, which should be performed by the translation in the target culture. This is not the same as the function performed by the source text in the source culture. Furthermore, Grosman (1993: 7) states that these functions can be completely independent and different. However, it is important that translation is able to perform its function. The translator should – before the beginning of the translation process – exactly know, what the purpose of the translation is, i.e. what they want to achieve with the translation in the target culture. If the translator's purpose does not compile with readers' expectations, the book's acceptance will be weak. Thus wanting a good acceptance, translators adjust to culture's ideology Lefevere (1992: 86-87). Thus according to Venuti (1998: 67), canons of domesticized translations are formed. They are adjusted to target cultures, aesthetic norms, dominant styles and themes, which causes considerable shifts from the source text. The consequences are substantial: creating stereotypes, prejudice, stigma, racism, patriotism

etc. Perceptions of other cultures based on translations are called cultural identity (1998: 67).

### III. DOMESTIFICATION

Adjusting source text to target cultures is called domestication. Venuti claims that domestication is necessary to some extent. Self-identification is necessary if translation can really come to life. On the other hand, a translator should make sure that domestication is present to some extent, since otherness must stay not only to retain readers' interest, but also to educate readers. Translated literature provides national literatures with an insight to itself, its own culture, its own social patterns etc. foreign literature provides a mirror for comparison and (self-)assessment.

Venuti (1998: 76) also claims that in the past some domesticized culture identities were created by adjusting foreign texts. The purpose was to create a new literary movement by creating authorial subject and literary discourse. Thus consequently translated text can potentially fill in the gaps, which exist in target culture due to language and cultural inaccessibility of a source language. Literary translation can also try to include a new genre or poetic form into a target literature, e.g. Italian sonnet into an English literature in the 16th century. However, simultaneously a new form offered new possibilities of verbalisation and expression. (Grosman, 2000: 83)

According to Venuti (1998: 76-77), a source text is accepted in the target cultural space when a reader can self-identify in it, can recognize familiar values found in the text. Self-identification means recognizing domestic cultural norms and means, which define reader's self, and domestic subjects. The reader identifies with the ideal in the translation. Usually these are values prevailing in domestic culture and dominate the marginalized ones.

Toury (1995) claims that a translation, which does not achieve a desired place in a target literary system cannot be regarded as a literary translation, because it does not function as a literary text. Such translation is just a transfer of a text from one literary code to another. He further on claims that the translation must be domesticized, i.e. accept the norms and models of a target literary system. On the other hand, he points out some drawbacks of such translations: loss and transfer of some basic characteristics of source text and adding new ones. But as Grosman (2000) emphasizes, Toury is not interested in readers' wishes – he does not ask himself if readers really long for another text with domestic subject and no foreign features, which might be the reason why some readers choose a foreign author. Grosman further on claims that this is the greatest flaw of Toury's theory, because the reader is the most important particle in the

chain of writing – translating – reading. If a translator followed his theory, it would lead to extreme domestication or so called acculturation.

Venuti (1998: 79) claims that translation practices have enough power to trigger sociological change, because no institution or theme is isolated from foreign ideologies. Identity is never changeless or permanent, but a contact of numerous practices, traditions, and institutions, which create terms for changes. He also argues that a translation can cause marginal values to challenge prevailing ones, because marginal values expand the interests of sociological groups. Religious, state etc. organizations can influence translation practice. Or said differently, they can exploit a translation to achieve their own goals. Authorities can control translation methods, modes, and strategies.

While fitting a text into a target culture, translators encounter difficulties on two other translation levels: poetics and discourse. It is often not simple to translate a genre into another language or culture. Thus a certain genre can arouse certain expectations in a target culture and vice versa. On a discourse level a translator can do things, traditions and concepts, which are understandable and comprehensible to the readers of a source text, but not to the readers of a target text (Lefevere, 1992: 88). This might be the reason that a decision, which text to translate, is influenced more by poetics and ideologies than by language and discourse. Thus translatability is specified on a much deeper level than the level of a language, because if a text is translatable, it is not necessarily worth translating or adjustable into a target culture. This is a concept of intercultural understanding, a concept of intercultural awareness, understanding of a personal and foreign cultural, recognizing differences etc. Grosman (2004: 34) claims that intercultural awareness is the most important precondition of each intercultural transfer. It demands additional capabilities, empathy, understanding/clarifying differences etc.

An important part of intercultural transfer of literature is so called cultural imperialism and hegemony, i.e. domination of one or more cultures over others. Languages and cultures have hierarchical relationship. In principle, languages with smaller number of speakers have scarce possibilities of enforcement (Grosman, 2004: 43-44, 1993: 9). The influential power of a culture is determined by the quantitative power of a culture and language (Ožbot, 2001: 391). Ožbot thus distinguishes between central/dominative and peripheral literary polysystems. The latter are by no means necessarily weaker in quality, they are only weaker quantitatively. This stratification influences translation practices, because central polysystems are more closed and self-sufficient, thus they translate less. Their translation

strategy is usually domestication since foreign discourse is often adjusted to target culture (the target-accommodating translation). Grosman (2004: 54) calls this process the appropriation and agrees, that it is more usual when translating/reading texts from less known cultures. Simultaneously we spontaneously assimilate the text. This happens on micro- and macrotextual level. The reader could detect intercultural shift only if they compared source and target texts.

Grosman (2004: 55) distinguishes between necessary adjustments of translation to target culture and those which arise from translator's inattention to differences and otherness. Thus these elements are lost, which can impoverish the text and bereave the reader for a new experience and informal contact with a foreign culture. Venuti (1989: 82) argues that a bad translation seeks for domesticized attitude towards foreign texts or so called ethnocentrism, while a good one forces domestic language and culture to detect foreign in a foreign text.

The very opposite happens in peripheral polysystems. These due to their smallness translate substantially, which coincides in foreignizing since translators stress source culture and its characteristics. Such translation practices are called the source-oriented translation.

Problems arise when two peripheral or peripheral and central cultures clash, because they can be different to such extent that they become incompatible. Therefore, it is of vital importance how familiar the readers are with a foreign culture, which they come in contact with. Logically, we are more familiar with culture, which are geographically closer. Each translator gets in contact with expressions, which are typical only for a certain culture, e.g. slang words, culinary expressions etc.

#### IV. ACCULTURATION

Readers' personal experience is likewise very important. For example, if we read a translation of a Bosnian text, a Slovenian reader should have no difficulties understanding their culinary expressions because of geographical closeness of both cultures and political connectivity in the past. It is completely different if we read a translation from an African text. In such case, a translator must reach a compromise, either domestication either foreignizing. In such examples Lefevere (1992) speaks of acculturation. Acculturation is a common expression for both domestication and foreignizing, so either we completely leave out foreign elements or completely leave them in. Said shortly, acculturation is a complete disregard of one culture, either source or target.

If a translator estimates that a foreign culture-bound expression is too exotic for the target readers, he can choose to explain the expression. For this purpose a

translator has two options – commenting and glossing. Commenting is explanation, which uses translator's own comments, while glossing is adding a source, literature list etc., where a reader can find needed explanations. Newmark (2000: 148-150) states that comments can be cultural (explaining differences between source and target cultures), technical (referring to the discussed theme), and linguistic (explain the unusual use of words). Grosman (1989: 67-68) argues that comments are very advisable when the target language does not equivalent words. She bases her thesis on the word "gentleman". In English cultural space the word has a sociocultural hint, while in Slovene it has no equivalents, which could satisfactory indicate to various meanings of the word.

Besides commenting and glossing, a translator has another option for providing explanations of intercultural elements, i.e. writing a foreword. The latter can explain cultural specifics of the source text. If readers get familiar with these specifics, they will not want domesticized text, because they will experience a text as an intercultural contact. Lately, some publishers like Longman, OUP, Cideb etc. publish non-translated texts with a foreword, which is dedicated to non-native readers, who do not have satisfactory knowledge of source literature and culture. Grosman (2000: 96) argues that the positive side of such forewords is that they provide a numerous information and explanations about a source culture, while the negative side is that they stem from the viewpoint of the source culture.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The article only briefly analyses a relatively new branch of translation science. Translators should be aware of how important cultural transfer is not only for broadening people's minds and knowledge, but also in fight against racism, prejudice etc.

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