X-Raying the Translation of Literary Style

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ABSTRACT

The complicated nature of literature is reflected in the complicated nature of literary style. If literature and literary style are difficult concepts to define with precision, their translation from one language to another should be expected to be either as complicated as the concepts themselves or even more complicated. The difficulty involved in the translation of literature and literary style is evidenced by the variety and diverse literary translation procedures translation scholars and researchers have proposed over the years. This paper attempts a review of some of the most prominent of these literary translation procedures and proposes a definite procedure for the translation of all literary works. The procedure involves analysis of the source text using various literary criticism approaches, identification of the stylistic devices or the indicators of style or what is sometimes called 'stylistic invariants' and then using basically foreignization or the literal translation procedure to translate all the identified indicators of style or stylistic devices, and domestication or oblique translation that should be used only where foreignization would be unintelligible and nonsensical. In other words, foreignization, operationalized through the literal translation procedure, calque and borrowing, should be the rule in the translation of literary works, while domestication or the oblique translation method should be the exception where lateral translation would be overtly incorrect.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars of literary translation like Van den Broeck (1985), Krause (1995), Gaddis Rose (1997a, 1997b); Bassnett & Lefevere (1988) and Boase-Beier and Holman (1999) assert that there is a direct relation between literary criticism and literary translation.

According to these scholars, the literary translator is equally a literary critic who pays special attention to the link between the source text and its linguistic and cultural context. The literary translator will thus:

> Want to know what role SL audience expectations and understanding played in the original writer's concern to earn the approval of his or her readers. Was the SL text, for example, perceived as representative of its genre or typical of its time, or did it, perhaps, without external commentary, stand out against its literary and cultural context as special? It is no bad thing for the translator to be aware too, in so far as this is even possible, of authorial intentions and of the particular personal constraints under which the author was operating. Was he or she concerned […] to communicate something to the reader whilst at the same time hiding from the censor? And did the chosen form […] emerge out of the impossibility of saying directly all that might have been expressed had social and political circumstances been different? (Boase-Beier& Holman, 1999, p. 8).

Literature is essentially expressive and the translation of literary style primarily involves identifying the literary devices within the source text and reproducing them as them as much as possible in the target text. Literary devices have a variety of classifications. According to Galperin I (http://piglet16narod.ru/contents.htm), a stylistic device is 'a conscious and intentional literary use of some of the facts of language (including expressive means) in which the most essential features (both structural and semantic) of the language forms are raised to a generalized level,' He classifies stylistic devices into the lexical level of stylistic device and the syntactical level of stylistic device. The lexical level of stylistic device is observable at five stages, namely, the interaction of dictionary and contextual logical meanings (metaphor, metonymy, irony);the interaction of primary and derivative logical meanings(polysemy, zeugma, pun); the interaction of logical and emotive meanings (interjections and exclamatory words, epithet, oxymoron); the interaction of logical and nominal meanings (antonomasia and the intensification of certain features of a thing or phenomenon(Simile, Periphrase, Euphemism, Hyperbole).

The syntactical level of stylistic device for its part also has five components, namely, the compositional patterns of syntactical arrangement (Stylistic inversion, detached construction, parallel construction, chiasmus, repetition, enumeration, suspense, climax, antithesis);the particular ways of combining parts of the utterance (asyndeton, polysyn-

deton, the gap-sentence link); the peculiar use of colloquial constructions (ellipsis, break-in-the- narrative, question in the narrative, represented speech), and the transferred use of structural meaning (rhetorical questions, litotes).

Skrebnev (2016) is another scholar who has classified stylistic devices. He classifies them into stylistic semasiology, stylistic lexicology, stylistic syntax and stylistic phonetics. According to this classification, stylistic semasiology comprises figures of quality in the metaphorical, metonymic and mixed groups, figures of relation of identity as in the superposition of identical elements (variation of synonyms),the substitution of identical elements (euphemisms, paraphrases) and figures of relation of contrast as in the superposition of the elements opposed in their meanings (antithesis, oxymoron), the substitution of one element by another one with opposite meaning (irony), and the relation of inequality (climax, anticlimax, hyperbole, litotes). Stylistic lexicology, for its part, involves different stratums of words: high-flown words, contextual coinage, lowered words etc. Stylistic syntax, in this classification, is observable in six features, namely the absence of speech components (ellipsis, aposiopesis, nominative sentences, asyndeton, apokoinu constructions),the excess of speech components (repetition, anadiplosis, syntactic tautology, polysyndeton, parenthetic sentences),unusual distribution of speech components (emphatic inversion),the interrelation of syntactical structures above sentence level (parallelism, chiasmus, anaphora, epiphora), the types of syntactical link between words and sentences, their stylistic function (detachment, coordination instead of subordination) and the unusual usage of syntactical constructions (rhetoric questions, negative constructions in the function of positive ones and vice versa, reported speech). Finally, stylistic phonetics is observable in euphony, onomatopoeia, alliteration and assonance.

While Galperin looks at stylistic devices at two levels, namely the lexical and syntactic levels, Skrebnev (2016) sees it at four different levels, which are the semantic level, the lexical level, the syntactic level and the phonetic level. Apart from the differences in the number of levels of the two classifications, the former, that is Galperin's classification, appears simpler, clearer, straightforward and more understandable than the latter. Although Galperin's classification has just two levels, it can be seen to cover all of Skrebnev's four levels of stylistic devices. This may be evidenced in the fact that the components of his stylistic semasiology, stylistic lexicology and stylistic phonetics can all fall under Galperin's lexical level of stylistic device as seen above. Notwithstanding the terminological differences in the two classifications, at the syntactic level, their components are basically the same. While Galperin calls this level the *Syntactic Level of Stylistic Device*, Skrebnev (2016) calls it simply as *Stylistic Syntax.* Within the framework of this paper, Galperin's classification appears more appropriate.

THE TRANSLATION OF STYLE

In literary texts, form is clearly indissociable from the content. It weighs more than content in literary works. In fact, it is the form that makes literary work timeless that is for the work to live and transcend time. A given context expressed by a social critic or a journalist would fade and die out rapidly whereas the same context expressed by a writer in a literary work would live on for years and centuries afterwards.

Before 1950, most translation was literary and most translation methods were basically source-text oriented, and such methods were later termed foreignization (Venuti, 1991). Such translation methods were also functional, that is to say the function of the target text had to be matched with that of the original in order to establish equivalency. Prominent among the functional theory proponents was Katherina Reiss (2000) with her famous text typology.

Also, translation practice can be said to have formally begun with literary translation (Bible translation) and even 'most of the books written on translation through the ages deal largely with literary translation' (Baker, 2001, p. 130). When we talk of literary translation, we are implicitly talking of the translation of literary style. The idea of translating literary style, in particular, can be traced back even to the time of Emperor Sargon of Assyria, who was pleased when his exploits were beautifully translated into many languages (Nida, 1964, p. 11). The notion has been sparsely and, sometimes, haphazardly treated in books on translation and translation journals, notably *Meta*. Most of these writings exemplify the rendering of literary style through the translation procedures employed by distinguished translators such as Cicero, Saint Jerome ('the Father of translators'), Etienne Dolet and Martin Luther, as well as through the functional and/or communicative theories of translation (Munday, 2001). It should be noted that the above-mentioned writers handled the translation of literary style rather indirectly in the prescription of their translation methods. This is relevant to this study because translating a literary text is translating literary style.

The translation of literary style can thus be seen in the translation methods proposed, in their mostly Bible translation, by Tullius Cicero, Saint Jerome, Etienne Dolet and Martin Luther. For Cicero (106-43 BC), translation was like any creative work of art and a translator could recreate and embellish the original. His translation method and creative attitude towards translation are typically exemplified in his famous statement according to which he translated not like an amateur but like an orator, with focus on the message conveyed by the words and sentences rather than on the words and sentences themselves (*De Optimo genere Oratorum*)

The above reference is corroborated by a similar one in Cicero's *The Best Kind of Orator* (Robinson, 2006, pp. 9-10, as cited in Wang, 2010, p. 406) as follows:

> I translated the most famous orations of the two most eloquent Attic orators […] and I did not translate them as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and forms, or as one might say, the 'figures' of thought, but in language which conforms to our usage. And in so doing, I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language. For I did not think I ought to count them out for the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were.

Elsewhere, Cicero opines that literal rendering is unsuitable and that translators should strive to reproduce the message and cogency of the original (*Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies*, 2001, p. 496). Saint Jerome advocated creativity in translation, except that of the Sacred Scriptures, and stressed the fact that meaning or message should first be considered before the structure or form (idem: 23). He revisited the rendering of the old Latin versions of the New Testament by the turn of the fourth century in the *Vulgate* and finished the translation of the Hebrew Bible and the main deuterocanonical books into Latin by 406 AD. He is known to have translated widely from contemporary Greek writers in a fairly classical style. He drew largely from classical rhetorics in his letters and prefaces. Although he advocated oblique translation and some modicum of creativity in translation, he believed so strongly that the accuracy of the source text, which he termed *veritas* (the truth), was crucial and inviolable in translation

Furthermore, Etienne Dolet could be seen as one of the proponents of creativity in literary translation. He advocated free translation, and in his *La manière de bien traduire d'une langue en l'autre (How to translate well from one language into another)*, published in 1540, he prescribed understanding the meaning of the original text; mastering both source and target languages; using the speech of ordinary people; and employing an appropriate tone as cardinal rules in translating.

His creative or rather free translation method is said to have cost him his life when his 'mistranslation' (at least from his accusers' judgment) of one of Plato's works gave the impression that Plato was an atheist. One of the examples of creativity in literary translation was shown by Martin Luther in his 16th century translation of the Bible into German. Perhaps the best old-time example of creativity in literary translation was showcased in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, generally known in translation circles as *les belles infidèles*.

During this period, oblique translation (equally) known as *les belles infièles f*ocused on producing aesthetic literature, which was a dominant feature of translation into French in a good part of the eighteenth century. At this time, classical works were imitations of contemporary French literary fashion and morality (Idem: 411). Here, the functional and communicative translation methods can be seen where focus is respectively on source and target texts. Similarly, the translation purpose is foregrounded in the sense that the aim is to provide the readers or receptor audience with the ideas in classical works of Greek and Latin authors. In consonance with Cicero and Etienne Dolet, Wang (2010, p. 406) holds that a translated literary work should read as an original. In a bid to substantiate her contention, she cites Mao Dun (1980 in Luo Xinzhang, 1984, p. 511) in the following terms:

> In Mao Dun's words, a literary translator should reproduce in the target language the artistic flavour of the original, and thus the translation can excite, delight and inspire the target language reader the same way as the original work has excited, delighted and inspired the source language reader

The ideas expressed in the above quotation appear to tie in squarely with Nida's (1964) notion of 'dynamic equivalence' in translation.

Drawing inspiration from Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Kuepper (1986) in an article published in a special edition of *Meta* and entitled 'Literary Translation and the Problem of Equivalency' comes out with a somewhat clear procedure for establishing equivalency in literary translation. This could be seen as a method for the translation of literary style, since, as already said above, style is what makes a literary text literary. So, once more, translating a literary text implies translating literary style. According to him, to establish equivalency, which should be functional, the following three steps have to be followed:

- The specific features of a literary work of art within a general text theory must be identified and related to an adapted semiotic model.
- The categories to be applied in the evaluation of a translation must be identified and classified in relationship to actual and potential translation procedures.
- The categories and criteria thus obtained must be verified by applying them against consistently occurring characteristics and features of a specific literary text (Kuepper, 1986, p. 243).

Explaining step 2 above, Kuepper (1986), (Idem) asserts that 'equivalency in the translation of literature is achieved when the text in the target language renders the content with a similar degree of indeterminedness within the relevant categories as the source text.

Summarizing his procedure for translating literature, he recommends as follows:

> In terms of equivalency, the preliminary principle that substitution procedures have priority over transposition procedures and both have priority over modulation procedures can be established; it would correspond to the old maxim that a translation should be as literal as possible and as free as necessary.

He asserts further that the above stated principle 'which calls for a similarity in form is, however, always superseded by the requirement that any segment of the target should be similar in function to the corresponding segment in the source text.

Although Kuepper's procedure for translating literature and its application, literary style, appears quite comprehensive, it falls short of specifying the procedure in relation to the various literary genres (prose, poetry, drama), which have their specificities. Hence, it might have been more edifying to indicate that before attempting to translate any literary genre, its specific characteristics in any particular text should be identified in the source text before the application of the proposed translation procedure, after which the said characteristics will be compared with similar characteristics in the translated or target text.

In his own contribution to theory relating to translating literary style, Massoud (1988) proposes that in the translation of imagery, the 'translation should give the same emotional effect'.

In a short but rich and incisive paper entitled 'The translation of literary style' Song (2003, p. 2) sees literary transla-

tion as a reproduction of the original artistic image in another language. He goes further in the same article and on the same page to indicate that such a reproduction should not simply be a technical linguistic alteration but rather that the translator should adequately capture all of the author's artistic creativity.

According to Song (2003), in translating literary style, both the literary and linguistic points of view should be considered. He further contends that the translator should have a macroscopic point of view of whatever he or she is translating and should permanently keep in mind that they are conveying someone else's literary work.

The shortcoming of this work on the translation of literary style is that it limits itself to verbose prescriptions, without any examples or texts to illustrate the prescribed procedures. The paper is not only too scanty (four pages) but void of any citation to boost it's scientific and research authenticity or worthiness. Furthermore, like Kuepper (1986), Song is too holistic in his approach to the translation of literary style. One would wonder whether the translation of literary style as concerns drama, poetry and prose is exactly the same.

For his part, Galina Goumovskaya (http://eng:1septemberru/2007/08/:htm) sees style as fundamental in matters of translation equivalence. To this end, he asserts that the translation equivalence issue is directly related to translational stylistics and that it is impossible to attain the required level of equivalence unless the stylistic specificities and peculiarities of the source text are strictly respected. After prescribing adequacy as the prime objective in the translation of style, he goes ahead to propose various ways of translating a number of stylistic devices. According to him, metaphor should be or is translated by 'keeping to semantic similarity', metonymy by the literal translation method, irony either by a semantic or pragmatic translation method, zeugma by a similar irregularity in the target language or by sticking to the regular target language meaning, a pun by a word in the target language with the capacity to generate two meanings in the same context, a paraphrase by a description, etc.

Although he prescribes adequacy in the translation of literary style, he tempers this adequacy in the source as follows;

> The stylistic equivalence pursuit is the cornerstone of Literary Translation. Style retaining is a highly problematic goal and it cannot be achieved completely. Concerning this issue, Levy believes that Literary Translation is a hybrid. It is not a monolith work of literature, but interpretation and conglomeration of two structures: on the one hand – content and stylistic peculiarities of the original text, on the other hand –the whole complex of specific features characteristic of the translator's language. In the work of literature, i.e. translation, these two stratums are in the state of permanent tension that can result in a contradiction.

It can thus be deduced from Galina's statement above that the translation of style, notably literary style, is a matter of approximation. This is because, as clearly stated in the foregoing citation, the style of the original text very often comes into conflict with that of the translator, who, notwith-

standing a conscious effort to retain the style of the original in his or her translation, cannot completely shed his or her own personal style from the translation.

For his part, Ji (2008), in a paper, contends that though previous studies have considered stylistic variation as source-text derivatives, literary translation should be seen as a creative process in its own right and that this creativity should be governed by the context. In this connection, he talks of a 'context-motivated theory of style-shifting in literary translation', while citing Labov (1972) as well as Eckett and Rickford (2001) as concerns specifically their studies on context-motivated or proactive speech variation in sociolinguistics. In other words, Meng Li advocates a context-based style shift in literary translation.

CONCLUSION

Given therefore the fact that the distinguishing trait of literature or a literary work is aesthetics, notably style, the prime goal of any literary translation should ideally be to render all the writer's style in the target text. Any stylistic shift should only be tolerated when, beyond reasonable doubt, it is discovered that sticking to the writer's style would lead to unintelligible, awkward and shocking writing. Such stylistic tilting, it should be emphasized, can only be an extreme exception and not a rule. Since the uniqueness, peculiarity or distinctiveness of any literary work or text is determined primarily by the writer's style, the translator should seek first to identify the characteristics or indicators of this style – in fact, the style itself –and then strive to transfer all of it to the target text, using foreignization or the literal translation procedure, as a matter of principle, and domestication only in exceptional cases where literal translation would be evidently nonsensical.

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