

Eötvös Lorand University, Budapest
Faculty of Humanities
Translation Studies PhD Programme

Adaptation and Retranslation

Thesis

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1. The importance of the research topic

The research topic of this dissertation is the place and role of adaptation and retranslation in Translation Studies (TS). Recently new interdisciplinary research topics have emerged in TS: translation and power, translation and subversion, post colonialism in translation. Thus translation is no longer regarded as linguistic corpus only, but may rather be viewed as social phenomenon which can be placed within the framework of TS as like all texts, translated texts are also socially/culturally constructed, while constructing culture.

2. Aim of the research

The aim of the research is to define what adaptation and retranslation is, and to highlight their common features, shared functions in constructing cultural/literary norms. Adaptation and retranslation are closely connected to cultural colonialism. However, in case of the birth of Hungarian vernacular literature the traditional sense of cultural colonialism – the stronger and bigger culture devours and domesticates the weaker one(s) – can only partly, if at all, be applied to Hungarian literature. By comparing the first translations to the retranslations one can see how norms have changed and how these changes have been influenced by current ideology. Analysing texts also shows if retranslation theory is valid or not. However, the corpus being small, one must bear in mind that the results are not necessarily regarded as full proof.

3. Theoretical background

The so called “cultural turn” (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998) has highlighted the importance of culture and ideology in TS, however, there have been earlier researches of investigating the norms of the target language influencing translation and thus also influencing its place within the literary polysystem (Even Zohar 1981; Toury 1995).

3.1 Adaptation

Based on Anglo-Saxon (Bassnett 1998; Lefevere 1992/a, 1992/b, 2004; Munday 2001; Venuti 1995) and Hungarian (Albert 2003; Burián 2003; Horváth 1976; Józán 2008; Klaudy 2003; Nemeskürty 1985; Szalay 1980;) literature, it is shown how in different periods of history the content of the notion of adaptation changed, what translation strategies it used, what position it had within the literary polysystem and how its function changed. Its relation to different genres is also shortly described.

3.2 Retranslation

Retranslation is strongly connected to the works of, among others, Álvarez and Vidal, Bassnett, Lefevere es Venuti (Álvarez and Vidal 1996; Bassnett 2005; Lefevere 1998/a, 1998/b; Venuti 2004) who say that retranslation is either strengthens or weakens norms, ideology and institutions of literature and literary canons. Hungarian examples are shown to illustrate the role and influence of publishers and editors in the process of retranslation. As for practice, Albert (2003) argues that different retranslations of the same source text will always be different.

The relationship between adaptation and retranslation is also demonstrated by studies dealing with translated children’s literature (Shavit 1986; Du-Nour 1995; Kujamäki 2001; Oittinen 2000; 2006; Vándor 2007).

3.3 Adaptation and retranslation

As I have already proved in an other article (Vándor 2007) the two types of translation are related according to, among others, Jakobson (1986), Popovič (1980; 1986) and Brownlie (2006), both being translations and both being influenced by and influencing the existing literary norms and canons, as well as the readers.

3.4 Retranslation hypothesis

When talking about retranslation hypothesis one must mention Berman (1991), Chesterman (2000) and Brownlie (2006), the former two as the ones who introduced retranslation hypothesis, the latter one as the one who argues against it. Also the role of the translator as the rereader of the text is inevitable to investigate, since this is the basis of the concept of the never-ending or open ended literary works. While in adaptation the translator has the role of the communicator and manipulator (Albert 2009), in case of retranslation (s)he has extra roles of the interpreter, reinterpreter and rewriter (Benjamin 2007: 183-195; Berman 2007: 338-361; Meschonnic 2007: 399-415; Schleiermacher 2007: 119-149).

4. Research questions

1. What is the connection between adaptation and retranslation?
2. Is it possible to draw general conclusion from the differences of the different retranslation, and can these differences being taken as general translation strategies?
3. Is retranslation hypothesis, namely that the further we go from the source text, the more we understand it and thus the closer we get to the true nature of it, true? Theoretical and practical questions arises, that is on what basis can one say about a translated text that it is nearer to the meaning of the source text than an other, earlier translation.

5. Research methods

To answer the above questions Durkheim's sociological method was used, the definition of the phenomenon, the reason of it and its function. After giving the definition of adaptation, retranslation and children's literature special attention was paid to the functions adaptation and retranslation played in the literary system, as well as to contemporary retranslations. Not only to the texts themselves, but to the publishing houses, to the editors, to those who ordered the retranslations (Jeney, Józán 2008; Szele

2005) and to what readers were they intended to. After reviewing theories some case studies are shown.

6. Methods of choosing and analysing texts

Due to the amount of translated novels restrictions had to be applied, therefore some of those English and American novels of the 19th century written by woman writers were chosen that were retranslated after 2000 and had successful film and television adaptations, thus the publishers could almost be sure as for the success of the books.

The chosen novels are Emily Brontë *Wuthering Heights* translated by István Sötér (1957), Mária Borbás (1993), Terézia Feldmár (2006); Jane Austen *Sense and Sensibility* translated by Mária Borbás (1976) and Emőke Sillár (2008), Charlotte Brontë *Jane Eyre* (1969) translated by Ruzitska Mária (1959) N. Kiss Zsuzsa (2007) and its adaptation for girls, *A lowoodi árva (The Orphan of Lowood)* rewritten by Imre Szász (1967; 2007); and L. M. Alcott *Little Women* translated by Margit Prém (1926); Katalin Sóvágó (2004) and Judit Barta (2006).

During the analysis two main lines were followed. One is that which Steiner used (Steiner 2005) when talking about the way translators read and understand the text and especially words to be translated. The other one is that which Albert (2003; 2009) used, and which is closely connected to Steiner, namely the problems the translator faces when actually translates the text and tries to find the function of words and sentences that functionally more or less equals to the source text. From the particular problems general conclusions were drawn as far as adaptation, retranslation and retranslation hypothesis is concerned. At this point one has to face the problem of the interpretation of the interpreted, since the person who analyses the translations and compares them to the source text, has his or her own interpretation of them, and thus must be very careful not to lose objectiveness which is one of the traps most difficult to avoid.

7. Conclusion

The answer to the research questions are as follows:

1. Placing adaptation and retranslation into historical/cultural context it can be argued that there is a definite connection between the two. Both were born for similar

reasons, both are the result of cultural encounters, both try to convey and interpret different cultures, both use translation strategies, both can re-establish or renew the existing literary canon, and most of all, in both cases there is a source language prototext. Therefore it can be said that as far as function is concerned, adaptation is very similar to translation and retranslation. What is more, adaptation itself can be the reason of retranslation.

Adaptation and retranslation can also be taken as special kinds of narration of translation (Brownlie 2006) from which point of view there is no real difference between adaptation and translation or retranslation. If we speak about narrative variants, a text can be shortened (adaptation), can be rewritten for film or stage (adaptation) and can be translated and retranslated into another language (Jakobson 1986).

2. It can be argued that domestication has deep roots in Hungarian literary canon which is based on the so called “Nyugatos” (*Nyugat* being one of the most prominent literary magazines in the first part of the 20th century in Hungary) way of translation.

The differences between the first translation and the retranslation(s) are mainly due to individual preferences. However, it can also be stated that there seem to be some tendencies in retranslations after 2000. These are mainly shown in using simpler sentence structures and less formal register, which may be due to changes in reception norms to which translators via publishers seem to adopt themselves. Since there is no representative data to help literary institutions and translators, they act upon their own instincts, defined by their own social/cultural positions, tastes and norms, just like their forerunners did at the dawn of national literature. As for translating personal and geographical names, there is no proof of general tendency, albeit translating proper names may seem old fashioned. As Borbás said (1981) when translating Jane Austen, “the novel should be classical, should be English, should be Jane Austen – and should address the contemporary Hungarian reader”. In our case “contemporary” is the key word, since this is the notion that changes all the time, and is changed by the time while influencing retranslation strategies. However this hypothesis should be proven by more detailed empirical research.

The similarities in retranslation strategies can be explained by the function these retranslations have in the cultural/literary system. If the translated and retranslated texts

have basically the same function, then the realization of this function, namely the translations will be basically the same no matter when they were born – unless the language itself has changed significantly. Since the function of the analyzed novels was partly to entertain, and nowadays it is mostly to entertain, it may be argued that this might be the reason of the changes in retranslations. Changes in social and cultural context can also be shown by paratextual level, especially the cover of the books reveal the function the books have.

The significance of paratextual signs is also emphasised in theories of children's literature where it is regarded as a special tool of domestication just like the voice of the translator who is invisible yet can be heard not only through the narrative (s)he uses, but through prefaces commentaries and notes.

3. The third question concerned retranslation hypothesis which states that either on the basis of the romantic improvement theory (Berman) or contrary to the paradigm of romantic idealism by means of scientific methods the further we get away from the time the source text was born and the more it is retranslated, the better translation we get, and that the first translation tends to use foreignization strategies, whereas the later ones uses domestication (Paloposki & Koskinen 2004). My own results contradict to this statement, and although the data is not sufficient, other researchers also have the same opinion (see Brownlie 2006) and at least it can be stated that the hypothesis is not yet proved to be a universal truth in translation. To go beyond hypothesis further empirical researches need to be carried out.

Retranslation hypothesis also has some theoretical problems. One is the question of getting nearer to the message of the source text, the other is the implicit suggestion that the more we translate, the better results we get and sooner or later the ideal translation can be achieved. Which means that (a) there is an ideal translation, it can be defined, and (b) if this statement is accepted than that means the end of the theory of open ended interpretation, and it must be declared that all literary works are close ended, there is no valid interpretation other than the ideal, and objectively true one.

Theoretically it is true that as time goes by more and more knowledge intertextual relation is accumulated, thus the translator have more means to interpret the text, however this doe not have to be true, as it could be seen by the analysis of *Little Women*

the retranslators did not seem to know the than contemporary meaning of the source text, and they remained at the level of “first decipher” (Bourdieu 1978: 179), thus their translation cannot convey all the message the source text contained. It may also be stated that from this point of view their translation can be considered as a sort of global adaptation.

Interpretation is also influenced by subjective understanding as well as objective requirements which are not always in agreement and retranslations born under this disagreement do not underpin retranslation hypothesis

Though further empirical research of a larger corpus and interviews with translators and publishers may contradict my conclusion I strongly believe that further investigation of retranslations will lead to better understanding of translation norms in the 21st century Hungarian prose translation.

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