

Poetry and Translation

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Abstract

It seems that we must really discuss quality of translation more than we do, despite the number of sources that claim to do that. We must think, for instance, about the artistic value of the translated version of an artistic piece, since plenty believe that there is independent, and original, art involved in the work of conversion or there should be. We must also introduce terms to better study the own process of conversion of pieces of writing that contain some artistic value. Furthermore, we must be able to finally describe with accuracy what we are actually doing when, for instance, translating a poem from one language into another. In this text, we intend to do exactly that. We here, once more, find application for the term Cultural Translation

Key Words: translation, poem, art, royalty, authorship, cultural.

Introduction

Some interesting articles have been published on PROz ((Akmali, 2010), (Dastjerdi, 2005), and (Azizinezhad, 2005)) about poetry and translation.

From (Akmali, 2010), we read:

آن ساز یفلک هر ساز زد در پ
م آوازی م و خوش خوانی به رقص آئی

Let's dance with heavens tune
Let's sing without fortune

Accuracy: As, in the translation, two stanzas have been treated as a whole, they are treated altogether for analysis. The translation of the first stanza seems to be relatively accurate at the words selected as the equivalents are semantically, pragmatically, and poetically close. A good equivalent (heaven) has been selected for the word “فلک”. In the second stanza, the message has been again sacrificed for the sake of rhythm.

Formal loyalty: In the translation of the 2nd stanza, we have a case of deletion. “میخوان خوش” has been deleted in the translation for no apparent reason. A structure parallel to the one used by the poet has been applied by the translator to correspond to the style of this stanza.

Naturalness: It seems that the translation of the first stanza is natural as the expression seems meaningful. However, the second stanza doesn't sound that natural as the idiomatic expressions are not translated. Heavens tune is a suitable collocation but without fortune sounds unusual, at least in this case.

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When Akmalı refers to accuracy, they seem to be considering *literal translation* (Pinheiro, 2014).
 When Akmalı refers to naturalness, they seem to be considering *cultural translation* (Pinheiro, 2014).
 From (Dastjerdi, 2005), we read:

So, contrary to some critics' argument, that poetry *loses* in translation or poetry is *untranslatable*, there are others with the opposite standpoint: That it can be preserved, illustrated and illuminated if a good job is done, because poetry is in large part found again and re-painted by the translator.

Of course, many of the original poetical touches of color cannot be transposed and *they must be arranged; yet these new arrangements may be even more luminous than the original*.

Destjerdi (2005) is definitely talking about cultural translation: We must adapt things to provoke the same feelings in the heart, mind, and perhaps even soul of the target readers, like the feelings that are provoked in the heart, mind, and soul of the source readers by the work we translate should appear in the heart, mind, and soul of the target readers when they read the translated version of it.

Aizinezhad (2005) says:

If we fail to translate poetry *properly*, i.e. if we cannot keep its artistic features in translation, it won't be regarded as a poem and a part of literature anymore.

In this way, we must make use of the technique called cultural translation when translating pieces of poetry. We will now talk about how exactly cultural translation should be applied in the case of poetry.

Development

Beare (2014) tells us that alliterations, metaphors, assonances, similes, rhymes, repetitions, and meters are some of the possible elements of a poem.

In being a work of art, something similar to a painting, a poem creates feelings in those who read it. Rhymes, for instance, create music in the minds of those who read a poem.

Repetitions create messages that will perhaps be kept in the mind of the reader forever.

Each element of a poem is designed, intentionally or unintentionally, to produce some effect in the minds, hearts, and souls of those who read it.

Consider this piece, which belongs to Gonçalves Dias (Communications, 1997):

*Minha terra tem palmeiras,
 Onde canta o sabiá;
 As aves, que aqui gorjeiam,
 Não gorjeiam como lá*

This piece has been extracted from *Canção do Exílio*, a poem that has been classified as one of the ten greatest Brazilian poems of all times by the *Revista Bula* (Leite, 2013), which is a magazine that specializes in literature and cultural journalism.

The importance of the poem is, in this case, undeniable: The hands to work on the conversion from one language into another would have to belong to a mind that understands the responsibility involved in the task.

The translator would have to have all patience on earth to identify the largest amount of artistic elements that they can identify in this poem before translating it.

Obvious rhymes are noticed: second with fourth, last word, and *gorjeiam* on third and fourth lines. We also notice one obvious repetition: *Gorjeiam*.

We observe that the *spirit of the poem* is the author (Beare, 2014), therefore a first person (*minha terra*).

The observations we have just made are all obvious and therefore a good translated version of the piece would have to contain those at almost any expense.

((Dastjerdi, 2005) tells us that it might be impossible to do that).

We now observe the following possible version of the piece in the British language (Pinheiro, 2013).

*My land has palms,
and that is the robin's singing's where;
The birds, who here warble,
do not warble as in there.*

It seems that *warble* has replaced *gorjeiam* with perfection here, so that the obvious repetition has been properly dealt with.

The rhyme of the second and fourth lines has also been preserved (last word, *where* and *there*).

The repetition makes the other rhyme.

The same spirit is seen in this version (first person, *my land*).

Basic mistakes are then not noticed in terms of the poetic elements involved.

We notice that this poem has been through a process of cultural adaptation because *sabiá* has been replaced with *robin*.

The choice has to do with how the robins appear in the Australian culture (the translator of the piece is in Australia), that is, with how the term appears in the Australian texts (there was a search for a bird that would be culturally equivalent, and therefore a search for the same type of situation, a situation in which *sabiás* appear, that is, a situation in which the term appears in the Brazilian culture). See (Pinheiro & Magagnin, 2016).

The technique used to translate this part of the extract (type of bird) was therefore cultural translation.

The second line has been stretched to accommodate the rhyme and, with this, we went from four to seven words, unfortunately.

There is an element that we do not see listed in (Beare, 2014) in a very clear manner. That is the meter. On (Lexiconic.net, 2013), we read:

Poetic Foot: The traditional line of metered poetry contains a number of rhythmical units, which are called **feet**. The feet in a line are distinguished as a recurring pattern of **two or three syllables** (*apple* has 2 syllables; *banana* has 3 syllables, etc.). The pattern, or foot, is designated according to the **number** of syllables contained, and the **relationship** in each foot between the strong and weak syllables.

Thus:

_ = a stressed (or strong, or **LOUD**) syllable

U = an unstressed (or weak, or quiet) syllable

In other words, any line of poetry with a systematic rhythm has a certain number of feet, and **each foot has two or three syllables with a constant beat pattern.**

We can easily see that the meter has not been respected in the translation of the extract of the Gonçalves Dias' poem that we here consider.

Notice however that the music formed by the whole of the piece is somehow similar.

A more graphical display of both pieces can give us a hint on how we are doing in terms of meter. See:

Minha terra bem palmeiras,	My land has palms,
Onde canta o sabiá;	and that is the robin's singing's where;
As aves, que aqui gorjeiam,	The birds, who here warble,
Não gorjeiam como lá	Do not warble as in there

We notice that the last two lines look incredibly similar, but the first two seem to have been inverted in terms of length after the conversion.

Ideally, the meter would be the same.

Notwithstanding, it is almost impossible not to sacrifice anything in the process of conversion of an artwork from one language into another: The more one language differs from another in terms of basic elements, say accentuation and order of the discourse elements in a sentence, the more loss should we see in the process of conversion of the linguistic artwork.

The accentuation in the Portuguese language differs in an essential manner from that in the English language (Pinheiro, 2014a): For instance, syllables in Portuguese receive graphical accents when there is a stronger stress on them.

That probably means that we do not have these stronger stresses on the syllables of the English language. Of course it could also be that we have them but we chose not to mark those graphically.

The order of the discourse elements in Portuguese differs quite a lot from that of the discourse elements in English at least sometimes: For instance, we say *the red haired boy* in English and we say *o garoto² do cabelo vermelho³* in Portuguese.

Shoebottom (2014) tells us about more differences.

House (1997) does not mention meter or metrics or syllable in her book, as for what is publicly available on the site we here use. Yet, on it, she deals exclusively with the topic *quality of translation*.

On page 48, House (1997) seems to state that poetry is part of the untranslatable items of human kind. She also seems to equate translating a poem to creatively transposing it.

Conclusion

A proper poem (with poetic elements) has to force the translator to use the technique artistic translation, since elements that create impact in one culture do not necessarily create impact in another. Using this technique will probably imply using cultural translation as well.

To compare translated versions of poems, and therefore to judge their quality, we should enumerate the poetic elements we see in the original poem according to their order of importance (most obvious to least obvious) and build a table with those.

Rhymes and repetitions would be part of the group of the *most obvious elements*.

Meter would probably be part of the group of the *least obvious elements*.

The first requisite for a person to translate a poem well is having respect for art, names, and human effort.

The amount of labour demanded from the translator when they translate a poem is extraordinary in all senses: Some creativity that goes well beyond the usual is demanded as well as scientific research to professional levels.

The translator is not a second author or a new author, but they are the equivalent to a sum of professions when translating poetry: psychologist, translator, interpreter, literary critic, journalist, researcher, historian, and others.

Poems are translatable items, for translating a work of art is recreating the feelings experienced by the observers of the source language in the observers of the target language.

There seems to be a generalized agreement amongst those who worry about the topic in the direction of how difficult translating poetry is: It is definitely one of the most difficult things a translator can be asked to do.

One should consider issues of the type *royalties* when it comes to the translation of poems, since there is also a generalized agreement in the direction of the translated version of a poem being art itself, and art that does not equate the original art, but art that is at most similar (hopefully similar enough).

One should probably think of pieces of software here, say Carta Certa and MS Word: One of them would have appeared first and therefore the other would be a copy in terms of the functions involved. Notwithstanding, despite the effects of the piece of software being the same in the user's minds (what they can do with it, security involved, etc.), the companies that produce them are different and each one of them profits independently.

2 boy
3 red

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