

TRANSFORMING LITERATURE: THE HERMENEUTICS OF TRANSLATION

Aba-Carina PÂRLOG

West University of Timișoara

Abstract: This article focuses on the manner in which the translator signals her presence in the translation of Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. In the light offered by semiotics and componential analysis, I will attempt to illustrate the differences regarding shades of meaning, the appropriateness of lexemes in the given context and the occasional inaccuracies that emerge in the TT. The study will also prove that receptor response is usually challenged by the effect the content, form and style of the ST had on the translator and that it loses its importance if the translation has not been previously evaluated.

Keywords: addition, dynamic equivalence, explicitation, free modulation, receptor response, shade of meaning

1. Introduction

The field of translatology focuses on the various manners in which meaning can be rendered in a target language as a result of the process of translation. Depending on the type of translation made, one must concentrate on diverse aspects which mirror an accurate sense transfer from one language to another. Besides meaning transfer, there are also many other factors that one must take into account if one is to put forward a successful translation.

A translator plays a paramount role not only in popularising the work of a writer in a different cultural environment, but also in giving a specific version of the SL text in the TL environment. My research paper centres on the manner in which the translator makes his presence felt in the literary work, in which she chooses to render the style of the ST and in which the dialogue author-translator develops. In the light offered by semiotics and componential analysis, I will attempt to illustrate the differences regarding shades of meaning, the appropriateness of lexemes in the given context and the occasional inaccuracies that appear in the TT.

The clash theory of translation - practice of translation will be as well dealt with in instances of translation in which a combination of genre-specific language functions is employed. The methods of translation used will also be under scrutiny and a conclusion will be drawn based on the opposition macrotext - microtext.

Nida's (2000) concepts of "formal" and "dynamic equivalence" will also be taken into consideration. His key terms characterising discourse function – coherence, impact and attractiveness (Nida 2004: 66-68) – will be instrumental in creating an informed view on the solution provided by the translator. The paper is also to prove that "receptor response" (Nida 2000) is challenged by the effect the content, form and style of the ST had on the translator and that it loses its importance if the translation has not been previously evaluated

2. Shades of Meaning

The dialogue author-translator takes place at the level of semiotics, the author gives a version of the story beginning the narrative in the same way as a painter starts a painting and continuing her plot in a similar manner. Each sentence can be compared to a brush stroke.

On transferring meaning the translator becomes an author herself, as she changes the direction of the brush stroke, the manner of applying colour and even its intensity. The rewriting of the story in a different language is thus synonymous to the repainting of a picture by applying similar colours, but not quite in the same way. Both are copies of the original, which are more or less successful depending on the freedom of expression that the TL system and culture or the density of the colour allows.

As far as the shades of meaning are concerned, there is a tendency of the translator to employ standard neutral words and expressions, some variations and class shifts with the occasional errors in meaning. Sometimes the neutral translation shows a transformation at the level of register. A formal shift may occur such as in the example:

SL: "Bit by bit he saw *the jumble* of wires spilling out at the top of the electricity pole" (Desai 1998: 17).

TL: "Încetul cu încetul, văzu *rețeaua* de fire ce pornea din vârful stâlpului de curent electric" (Desai 2008: 34).

The noun "jumble" suggests the main character's incapacity of distinguishing among the roles of the wires. To him there is a tangle of wires whose individual purpose he cannot guess. By employing the Romanian equivalent "rețeaua", although there is no class shift, one changes the idea implied by the narrator. The wires are suddenly arranged in a particular order, each having a well-defined purpose. In the TT, the character appears well aware of the fact that each wire is of great importance and occupies a specific place in a matrix. It should have been translated with "încurcătura", which maintains the register and idea present in the ST, so as not to mislead the receptor.

Another example of turning the text into a neutral piece is the following:

SL: "*the cloudiness* in his mind" (Desai 1998: 18).

TL: "*ceața* din mintea sa" (Desai 2008: 35).

From a semantic point of view, the proper meaning of "cloudiness" suggests excessive clouds, the forming of thick fog, whereas the Romanian equivalent employed, although appropriate at the level of class, being a noun, is more neutral, indicating only the idea of fog without difference in the shades of meaning or associations made in connection with it. Thus, the metaphor indicating the character's

complete ignorance in the ST, turns into a metaphor only signalling his ignorance in the TT.

This milder translation of the ST also results in modifications at the level of style. The author's richly expressive and vivid text might run the risk of becoming formal and simple in the TL. The translation is thus diluted and less impressive than the original.

There are also other differences in the translation of lexemes as far as shades of meaning are concerned which are transferred from one part of speech belonging to the ST to a different part of speech belonging to the TT. These only succeed in recasting the original in an imperfect mould which leaves a false impression about the ST upon the receptor.

SL: "he *demanded ferociously* of his mother" (Desai 1998: 5).

TL: "își *apostrofa plin de cruzime* mama" (Desai 2008: 15).

If componential analysis is applied to the adverb "ferociously", the semes implied would be [+savage], [+fierce], [+cruel] or [+violent], according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary. The construction "plin de cruzime" is insufficient in order to express the meaning of the ST, only rendering the idea of 'extreme meanness'. The implied seme [+aggressive] is missing. A class-shift (Catford 2000) or transposition (Vinay, Darbelnet 2000) can be noticed as the meaning of the English adverb is partially expressed by the Romanian noun phrase.

There is also a partial transfer of the adverbial seme [+aggressive] to the verb "a apostrofa" which covers the meaning of both the verb "to demand" and the adverb "ferociously" in the Romanian language. While the seme [+to scold] remains at a suggestive level in the English language, in Romanian, it is part of the meaning of the verb phrase.

This redistribution of semes to other parts of speech results in an almost successful retention of meaning. Still, at the level of style, Desai's emphasis is partially lost, the force of the language being split between lexemes, while in English it is concentrated on the adverb "ferociously". Nevertheless, due to the dynamic equivalence used, whose "focus of attention is directed (...) toward the receptor response" (Nida 2000), the translation is natural and consequently easily accepted and understood by the receptor.

Sometimes there appears a difference in the semes used, such as in the case of fragments like:

SL: "... he has a fear of these *uncontrollable* messy *puddles* of life, the *sticky* humanness of things" (Desai 1998: 6).

TL: "... să se teamă de *scursorile* mizere și *incotrolabile* ale vieții, de umanitatea *lipicioasă* a lucrurilor" (Desai 2008: 15).

While the noun 'puddle' is characterised by the seme [+static], the Romanian noun 'scursoare' contains the seme [+moving]. The latter is derived from the verb 'a se

scurge', i.e. 'to leak'. The translator changes the apparent paradox of the ST "uncontrollable (...) puddle" with a common TT construction meant to stand for the unpleasant states of the human body. The text is rewritten by the translator at the level of the suggestive/ implied meaning.

However, the paradox can somehow be retraced in the TT by the use of the adjective "lipicios" in the place of "sticky", which suggests the idea of the static nature of unpleasant bodily states. Still, the emphasis made by Desai is again lost in Romanian, while in English she repeatedly expresses this idea in order to clarify the protagonist's dislike of such states that seem to last forever and that must be, by all means, avoided.

There sometimes also appear inaccuracies on assessing the shades of meaning of the words translated, as in the following example:

SL: "She drew dishes that she had never eaten: *a black buck*..." (Desai 1998: 8).

TL: "Desenă mâncăruri pe care nu le mâncase vreodată: *o ciută*..." (Desai 2008: 19).

The noun "buck", defined by the semes [+deer], [+male] is considered an equivalent of "ciută" [+deer], [+female]. The faulty rendering of the meaning of the noun changes the implications of the text, which all point to the strangeness of Kulfi's – a character of Desai's novel – tastes. Desai re-emphasises this by mentioning the adjective "black" which is lost in translation. Consequently, the character's strange culinary urges become less obvious in the Romanian translation, at least in this case.

3. Additions

Besides the occasional slips, the translator seems to favour additions which appear under the form of extra words, explicitions and idiomatic translation. In the case of the following SL text, the translator included extra words for the sake of emphasis:

SL: "The heat (...) melted the grease in the brigadier's moustache so that *it* drooped and uncurled..." (Desai 1998: 2).

TL: "... unsoarea din mustața brigadierului se topea *în așa hal*, că *aceasta* se lăsa și se descrețea..." (Desai 2008: 9).

The extra words used by the translator in her TT are meant to emphasise the extent to which the grease of the Brigadier's moustache was melted, making the effect predictable. The SL version is quite different specifying the cause of the process, "the heat", which in the TL is left implied. Instead, in the TT, the translator uses the impersonal verb "se topea", which makes the reason less obvious. The combination of formal and dynamic equivalence results in an acceptable version with the exception of the conjunction "că", which should be replaced by "încât" in order to correctly formulate the consecutive clause.

There also takes place an explicative shift. The personal pronoun “it” of the SL subordinate, having the function of subject, is rendered by the Romanian demonstrative pronoun “aceasta”, i.e. “this”, which agrees in gender with the feminine noun “mustață”, i.e. “moustache”. The additions used help clarify the text, but also change the writer’s style creating an emphasis in the TT, while in the ST this remains at the level of implication.

Explications are as well used with the aim of making the TT intelligible for people who might not be aware of the meaning of particular lexemes. The need of creating a natural TT is also felt, which is why further explanations are sometimes necessary.

SL: “Problems *have been located in the cumulus* that have become overly heated” (Desai 1998: 1).

TL: “Problemele *au fost depistate la nivelul norilor cumulus*, care s-au supraîncălzit” (Desai 2008: 7).

The noun phrase “in the cumulus” is explicitly translated with “la nivelul norilor cumulus”, making it impossible for one to misinterpret the noun “cumulus”. The worded translation is in concordance with the original which is supposed to be part of a newspaper article. The language used is neutral, impersonal and informative. To suit her purpose, the translator also added a seme [+negative] on transferring the meaning of the predicate “have been located” to the TL. This is translated by “au fost depistate”, thus also emphasising the negative aspect of the noun “problems”. The Romanian translation is as a result more exact befitting a newspaper article.

Nevertheless, the combination of the “expressive function” and the “informative function” (Newmark 1995: 39-41) present in the original is lost in the translation. Although theoretically the translator should have paid attention to the genre specific function, i.e. the informative one, characteristic of newspaper articles, in this context, that of a humorous novel, she should have paid more attention to the expressive function and less to the reportorial style of the TT.

Another explication can be found in the following ST:

SL: “Shahkotians argued for spots directly below *their ceiling fans*” (Desai 1998: 2).

TL: “... cei din Shahkot se certau pentru locurile aflate exact sub *palele ventilatoarelor care atârnav din tavan*” (Desai 2008: 10).

The additional lexemes that the translator uses have a distinct effect. While the former is a superfluous, “free modulation” (Vinay, Darbelnet 2000), as one imagines the effect of the fans, there being no necessity of mentioning the parts of a fan, the latter can be considered necessary because it helps the translator word the text in a natural Romanian language and thus employ Nida’s dynamic equivalence. Otherwise the text would have been abrupt from a phonetic perspective, because of the plosives [b], [d] and [t]: ‘exact sub ventilatoarele din tavan’. This leaves the impression of a sentence that lacks euphony.

Another manner of adding meaning is by making an idiomatic translation in cases of STs in which no idioms appear. The idiomatic translation of the pieces of the ST: (1) "Foreigners in their tour buses *turned...*" (Desai 1998: 2), translated by "Străinii cu autocarele lor *făcuseră stânga-mprejur...*" (Desai 2008: 10); (2) "*only for minutes*" (Desai 1998: 2-3), translated by "*preț de câteva minute*" (Desai 2008: 10) and (3) "*hurrying back*" (Desai 1998: 2-3) translated by "*se întorceau într-un suflet*" (Desai 2008: 10), enrich the TT with dimensions which the ST is completely devoid of. In the first case humour is created, an effect which the ST lacks; in the second case, the translator uses an expression specific to the Romanian language to render the meaning of a neutral English construction, emphasising the cultural aspect, while in the third case the Romanian idiom formally enriches the text with an expressive function by the simple use of the noun "suflet", i.e. 'soul', which loses its proper meaning, but still elicits a different receptor response as opposed to the ST. The translation is as a result more complex and evocative at the same time as opposed to the original.

A case of idiomatic translation can also be found in the following case:

SL: "Oddness, like aches and pains, fits of tears and lethargy always *made him uneasy*" (Desai 1998: 6).

TL: "Ciudățeniile, la fel ca durerile și junghiurile, accesele de plâns și letargia, *il făceau să nu se simtă în largul lui...*" (Desai 2008: 15).

The translator again opts for the cultural enriching of the TT. Instead of translating "made him uneasy" by "îl nelinișteau", offering a clear and concise variant of the text in the TL, as advised by theorists, she alters Desai's style leaving the impression that the writer focused on British English idioms, whereas she rather emphasised Indian English linguistic elements.

4. Figures of Speech

Among the changes operated by the translator at the level of the figures of speech, one can notice the omission of metaphors with the exception of the fluid ones, the creation of personifications and the recreation of fluid metaphors.

4.1. Metaphor Omission

In Newmark's (1988: 91) view "a deletion of a metaphor can be justified empirically only on the ground that the metaphor's function is being fulfilled elsewhere in the text". In a case such as the following, one can notice the annihilation of the metaphor and the transfer of sense without any compensation at the level of style.

SL: "She drew a pond, dark but *leaping with colourful fish*" (Desai 1998: 7).

TL: "Desenă un heleșteu întunecat, dar *plin de pește colorat*" (Desai 2008: 18).

The explicit English metaphor “leaping with colourful fish” characterised by the seme [+movement] and [+jump] is turned into a neutral text in Romanian characterised by the seme [+quantity]. The vividness and liveliness of the original microtext is lost in translation and replaced by the rather uninteresting common microtext “plin de pește colorat”. The translator refrained from recreating a similar metaphor in Romanian which would have preserved the meaning of the ST.

Another example of a metaphor omission is “*chewing on famine relief*” (Desai 1998: 13) translated by simply interpreting the ST, by “*scăpaseră de foamete*” (Desai 2008: 27). The implied comparison between “relief” and “food” is lost in translation. The Romanian variant neglects the expressive/aesthetic function leaving the text at an informative level.

4.2. Personification Creation

Kövecses (2002: 35) considers personification “a form of ontological metaphor”. This might be an explanation for which the translator seems to make use of stylistic compensation by including personifications in the place of the omitted metaphors elsewhere in the TT. Personifications are thus included in the TL version in cases in which there are none in the SL. For instance, “*murky yellow haze*” (Desai 1998: 1) is translated by “*ceața gălbuie și tristă*” (Desai 2008: 7). Desai’s text is not figurative; there is no suggestion of human feelings in it. The Romanian translator beautifies her style, by adding this personification. The noun “gălbuie” is used in order to compensate “the lack of light” also emphasised by “murky”.

Another instance of personification creation is “*rain pouring through windows*” (Desai 1998: 11), translated by “*ploaia spăla ferestrele*” (Desai 2008: 24). The Romanian personification does not function in this specific instance as the meaning of the original is misinterpreted. The rain is suggested to have entered the house and not to have just washed the windows as expressed in Romanian by the translator.

4.3. Transforming Fluid Metaphors

The fluid metaphors created by Desai are sometimes turned into material ones by the translator, such as in the following example:

SL: “Others running to a *marketplace overflowing* with things to bargain over” (Desai 1998: 8).

TL: “Alții alergând spre o *piață înțesată* de lucruri pentru care merită să te târguiești” (Desai 2008: 18-19).

The common seme of the two “cliché metaphors” to use Newmark’s (1995: 107-108) terminology, is [+excessive quantity], while the seme [+to flow] is turned to [+to weave]. Thus the implication that the marketplace is like a river which overflows is changed with the one that it is similar to a tapestry.

Another fluid cliché metaphor “*the morning sun that streamed through the window*” (Desai 1998: 25) is translated by “*lumina soarelui care pătrundea prin*

fereastră” (Desai 2008: 47). The fluidity of the light is annihilated in Romanian by turning it into an unknown material entity entering the window. The translator again manages to alter Desai’s fluid style by neglecting the family of the lexeme water, the expressions and collocations associated with it.

A fluid metaphor, “the jumble of wires *spilling out* at the top of the electricity pole” (Desai 1998: 17) is neutralised by “rețeaua de fire *ce pornea* din vârful stâlpului de curent electric” (Desai 2008: 34). The translator did not notice Desai’s tendency to use fluid metaphors which is why she has neglected their reconstruction in the TL. The metaphor is avoided altogether, the translator again feeling the need of underlining the informative language function despite the fact that the literary text is defined by the expressive and aesthetic language function.

5. Style and Repetition

The translator sometimes makes faulty use of repetition altering Desai’s style, creating pleonasm or including unnecessary figures of speech. In the following example, the translator employs the repetition “vulcanice” and “vulcanilor” which cannot be found in the original.

SL: “It is all a result of *volcanic* ash thrown up in the latest spurt of activity in Tierra del Fuego” (Desai 1998: 1).

TL: “Fenomenul se datorează cenușii *vulcanice* eliminate în atmosferă de ultimele erupții ale *vulcanilor* activi din Țara de Foc” (Desai 2008: 7).

The TT lacks the force suggested by the original text. Words such as “thrown up” and “spurt” emphasise the idea of excessive energy. The implied movement is from the volcano into the air. The translation, on the other hand, neutralises the first lexeme by using “eliminate”, i.e. ‘eliminated’, thus reducing, almost annihilating the idea of energy. “Spurt of activity” is freely translated by “vulcani activi”, i.e. ‘active volcanoes’, a rather neutral expression, suggesting some form of energy at a some level.

Pleonasm also appears in the TT sometimes. “Mr Chawla himself” (Desai 1998: 1) is translated by “Chiar și domnul Chawla însuși” (Desai 2008: 8). The translator has probably not noticed that the emphatic pronoun was no longer necessary once the construction pronoun + conjunction “chiar și”, containing the semes [+even] and [+also], had been used, although for the sake of an accurate translation she should have retained the emphatic pronoun and not the conjunction construction.

The repetitive style used by the translator can also be noticed at the level of the literary devices employed, such as assonance.

SL: “leaping beyond memory and imagination” (Desai 1998: 2).

TL: “depășind orice închipuire și amintire” (Desai 2008: 9).

The repetition of the final syllable mirrors the stylistic imperfection which does not characterise Desai's style in this case.

When the writer really wishes to emphasise the idea of the strangeness and disorganised nature of her character by using repetition, the translator avoids it.

SL: "She walked through Shahkot like this, as distracted as this, as strange as this" (Desai 1998: 4).

TL: "Aşa mergea prin Shahkot, stranie și zăpăcită" (Desai 2008: 12).

The translation should have been '*tot așa de absentă, tot așa de ciudată*'. The lexemes used in Romanian "stranie" carries the extra seme [+supernatural] which is not present in the original, while "zăpăcită" carries the seme [+disorganised] as opposed to [+unattentive] present in the ST.

6. Conclusion

The translator makes more use of the informative function than the expressive one, neglecting the fact that Desai has written a literary work. An analysis of her work should have been done so that the translator might discover the specific features of the ST and avoid adapting it from the point of view of style. Without these specific features, i.e. certain shades of meaning, figures of speech and other stylistic aspects, the translation lacks the flavour of the original.

A clash macrotext - microtext takes place in some instances, in which some characters appear smarter or more common in the Romanian translation, as opposed to the original text. The SL text is thus inefficiently rendered, the translation contradicting some basic features that define the novel.

All in all, the published translation of Desai's work seems to offer a debate between writer and translator. Despite overall compensations, the translation is, however, often characterised by inaccuracies and omissions. The dialogue author - translator sometimes turns into parallel monologues in which the style of the original work is transferred without the intended results.

References

1. Catford, J. C. 2000. 'Translation Shifts' in *The Translation Studies Reader*. ed. by L. Venuti, advisory ed. M. Baker, London and New York: Routledge, available at www.questia.com [accessed September 2009].
2. Desai, K. 1998. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, London: Faber and Faber.
3. Desai, K. 2008. *Zarvă în livada de guave*, Iași: Polirom.
4. Kövecses, Z. 2002. *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, New York: OUP.
5. Newmark, P. 1988. *Approaches to Translation*, New York: Prentice Hall.
6. Newmark, P. 1995. *A Textbook of Translation*, New York: Phoenix ELT.
7. Nida, E. A. 2000. 'Principles of Correspondence' in *The Translation Studies Reader*. ed. by L. Venuti, advisory ed. M. Baker, London and New York: Routledge, available at www.questia.com [accessed September 2009].
8. Nida, E. A. 2004. *Traducerea sensurilor. Traducerea: posibilă și imposibilă*, Iași: Institutul European.

9. Vinay, P. and J. P. Darbelnet. 2000. 'A Methodology for Translation' in *The Translation Studies Reader*. ed. by L. Venuti, advisory ed. M. Baker, London and New York: Routledge, available at www.questia.com [accessed September 2009].