

Ideologically-adapted Translations: Challenge for Adequacy, Need for Retranslation

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Abstract

Translation has always been regarded as the main channel for disseminating works of art, literature and culture. Throughout the history, Azerbaijani writers and poets have contributed to the world literature, as well as benefitted from the best literary masterpieces of the world by means of translation. The art of translation is the credit to the interaction between nations, cultures, and literatures in particular. However, the path of historical development of the national translation studies and translation practice in Azerbaijan has not always been smooth. Azerbaijan has for 70 years been a part of the USSR, and consequently all fields of human life, as well as translation activity were under strict control of the central authority. Ideological censorship imposed on culture, art and literature, particularly, on the literary translation can still be sensed today. The aim of this paper is to study the ideological deviations, adaptations and modifications in fiction translation during the Soviet period in Azerbaijan and to show why retranslation of such works is necessary in our country.

Keywords: translation, adequacy, ideological impact, censorship, retranslation, source language, target language

1. Introduction

Translation is not a mere transfer of words from one language to another, this process involves primarily the transfer of meaning, culture, and values. However, the meaning in different languages is expressed by means of different grammatical constructions, lexical chunks and phrases which bear the traces of historical, cultural, and moral experiences, as well as customs and traditions. In this regard, the equivalence of meaning must be emphasized. Words and phrases that express this meaning are the units of meaning. According to the linguistic translation theories, proper transfer of semantic and pragmatic meaning, as well as stylistic peculiarities of the source text is central to an adequate translation. If translator fails to find appropriate equivalents of the stylistic means and devices used in the source text, adequacy will not be gained.

Debates on translation since late 1960s, though under different concepts and approaches such as formal vs. dynamic equivalence (Nida, 1964a), semantic vs. communicative translation (Newmark, 1988), overt vs. covert translation (House, 1977), adequacy vs. acceptability (Toury, 1995), and functional approach (Christiane, 1997), tried to deal with the issue of the source or target-language oriented translation. G. Toury uses the notion of equivalence to elaborate his categories of “adequate” and “acceptable” translations. According to him, if translation process moves towards the source text, the translation product will be adequate. On the other hand, if translation process moves towards the norms in the target language, the result will be an acceptable target text (Toury, 1995). Adequacy is determined on the comparison of the textual elements, whereas acceptability on the comparison to target cultural elements. The context of culture in which the words exist needs to be preserved in order to achieve a successful translation. People of different cultures perceive the world and objects differently; even the words that are functionally identical have different mental and ethical associations. Thus, in the pursuit of an adequate translation, the translator will tend to adhere to the norms of the source text and, in general, those of the source language, while in the search for strategies to achieve an acceptable translation, he/she will be guided by the norms of the target text and language respectively. However, even the most adequacy-oriented translation involves shifts from the source text. In fact, the occurrence of shifts has long been acknowledged as a true universal of translation.

Indeed, the translator, being aware of the power of the word employed by the author to create specific literary effect, worries about the reader whose poetic and literary taste is unpredictable and vague. Such an attitude is

excusable, since the main intention of the translator is to make his translation easily accepted and adopted by the target audience. In addition to having a good command of working languages, being a master of translation techniques, and possessing in-depth knowledge of translation theory, in order to render the best version of a foreign masterpiece, the translator needs to have at least as much talent and artistic merits as the author of the original work. Furthermore, the translator is required to know the history of the two nations involved, as well as to be well acquainted with all details relating to his author's manner, his/her style of writing.

The proper choice of approach is conditioned by some other factors as well. In literary translation the translator has to adopt a retrospective approach, i.e., the translator "looks back" at the source text, at the author of the ST, what he/she wants to express and how he/she expresses it. There is no parallel or model text in the target text to refer or to use. The translator has to be loyal to the author, because even he or she reproduces the original text in the target language, the translation will be marketed under the name of the original author. However, in non-literary translation, translator adopts prospective approach, i.e. he/she "looks forward", benefits from the available parallel texts existing in the target language and tries to produce the relevant text to meet the expectations of the target audience.

Unlike the author of the source text, who feels free to write whatever he/she thinks, imagines, or comes from his/her inner world, translator's freedom is not only confined by the dependence on the author, but also by the impact of culture and tradition, ideology, censorship, sociolinguistic factors and even by the "stereotyped" pre-translations. From all these factors, the impact of the ideological ones seem to be rather long-lasting and hard to reveal and eliminate.

Linguistic context of the text unite with extra linguistic (situational) context. Extra linguistic information in the source text may include cultural, traditional, political and historical factors and data which should not be ignored by the translator. The content of the literary text may contain all kinds of cognitive, cultural, and aesthetic information. Not only linguistic differences between the languages, but also a cultural and aesthetic gap between them poses a challenge to the translator. In the case of the lack of similarity between source and target culture, the methods adopted by the translator include either cultural substitution or adaptation which fails to render originality of the ST. Untranslatable elements are subjected to modification, alteration, addition, and omission at worst. While the problem of linguistic untranslatability in translation can be compensated by lexical and grammatical transformations, those associated with different cultural concepts, historical norms and moral standards are too difficult to overcome. One of the frequently employed culturally-bound element in literature is allusion. The reason why author uses allusion can be linked to the pragmatics (implicature, inference and relevance). A proper name associated with a specific historical period or event can be used as an allusion in the source text. The author using allusions expects his/her reader to be familiar with the referent. The author is free to choose any literary device, however, the same cannot be claimed for the translator. Being dependent on the author in terms of providing semantic adequacy, the translator must think of the target reader whose attitude towards the target text and its author is not predictable. Proper transmission of the allusion is a real challenge that translator encounters. In addition to full understanding of the allusion, the translator is required to decide whether to preserve the original allusion or replace it by cultural equivalent, or to omit it at all:

"Love affairs were regarded almost as seriously—where men hold such secrets as Churinga concealed, even the simplest of girls carried all the menace of Mata Hari- and just to be on the safe side nobody stayed more than a year in the area anyway" (*Moon in the Ground*) (Antill, 1979).

"Qadınlarla görüşmək məsələsinə də burada ciddi baxırdılar-Çuringa kompleksində işləyənlərin özü belə gizli saxlanılırdı, hətta adı qızlardan burda casusluq qoxusu gəlirdi, ona görə də başı salamat olsun deyə burda heç kəs bir ildən artıq qalmırdı" ("Yerə enmiş ay").

Back translation: *"The issue of flirting with women here was regarded seriously as well, even those working in Churinga were concealed and even ordinary girls had the smell of espionage. Therefore, to be safe nobody stayed here more than a year"*

Here allusion to *Mata Hari* has been neutralized by the translator and rendered by a more general expression which literally means "smell of espionage". Instead of generalized expression, it would be more advisable to preserve the word *Mata Hari* and provide explanatory information either in the footnote or in the glossary: *Mata Hari- a Dutch dancer and member of the German secret service in Paris during WWI who obtained military secrets from allied army officers of high rank. She was tried in court and shot by the French. She is often considered to be a good example of an attractive woman that men cannot refuse to please.* (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English [LDCE], 1995)

Being a cultural and linguistic bridge between different nations, translation plays a very important role in the

struggle between rival ideologies as well (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990). The role of politics in terms of the choice of source text to be translated and the strategy adopted as regards to that text cannot be ignored. From the very simplest task of translating a tourist brochure for a client to introducing a new novel by a famous writer to the target audience, the translator thinks of satisfying the needs and demands of his/her target reader. Translators by means of translation can express relevant attitude of their clients and target readers and even their own stance on the dominant ideology. The ideology of a translation can be sensed not only in the target text, but in the voicing and stance of the translator, and in the relevance to the receiving audience. (Tymoczko, 2003).

2. Impact of the Soviet Ideology

In translation, ideological considerations proved to be more important than linguistic ones (Cronin, 2003). While part of the Soviet Union for 70 years, Azerbaijan suffered from the ideological censorship imposed on the translation of foreign literature. In spite of the fact that Soviet translation school was even now is regarded of the strongest translation schools, the methods, principles and strategies adopted by Soviet translators were dictated by the totalitarian regime. Propagating the ideas of fluency, naturalness and readability inherited from the domesticated translation method, which was first proposed by German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1813 (Bayramov, 2008), Soviet translators tried to protect and maintain purity of the Russian language, to enlighten readers and neutralize social status of the original text by eliminating its foreign elements (Vid, 2007).

In Azerbaijan, a greater portion of world literature was translated during that period and, had to strictly conform to the totalitarian censorship rules. The translators did not have direct access to the original literary works, and had to translate them into Azerbaijani from Russian, which at the time enjoyed that status of an international language. Only works of those authors who had successfully passed “Moscow’s censure” were allowed to be translated into Azerbaijani. There were some prominent authors whose names were blacklisted by Moscow. George Orwell, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Kafka, Samuel Becket, H. Miller were dangerous to be translated to Russian, there from Azerbaijani.

The works of the authors “approved” by Moscow were mainly translated by prominent writers or poets who contributed linguistic and aesthetic effects to the target text, however failed to render properly what the author wanted to say due to the lack of access to the original. Thus, the works of Soviet translators can be assessed in terms of literary merits rather than their faithfulness to the original.

Following a long period of the Russian-mediated translations, 1970-80s saw rise in the number of translations made directly from original. In 1985, *Moon in the Ground* by Australian broadcaster and writer Keith Antill (1929-1999) was translated from English into Azerbaijani by Gilinchkhan Bayramov. It is the first novel translated from English into Azerbaijani. In 1988, a bestselling novel *Airport* by Arthur Hailey was translated into Azerbaijani by Zeydulla Aghayev. Ira Levin’s novel *A Kiss Before Dying* was also introduced to the Azerbaijani reader by Zeydulla Aghayev in our native language. The novel was published in 1998. Unlike those translated from Russian, the mentioned books were introduced to readers with a special note “translated from English by...”, rather than “translated by...”, which made them distinctive (Antill, 1979/1985).

In 1990, a year before the collapse of the USSR, another masterpiece of the world literature *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger was translated from original by Tehran Valiyev as “Çovdarlıqda uçurumdan qoruyan” (literally: “Catcher over the abyss in the Rye”). This translation is regarded by the literary critics and reviewers as one of the best translations in Azerbaijan. Tehran Valiyev’s *Holden* speaks in a fluent and natural language, free from any blasphemous, obscene language, and swear words, which contradicts original Holden, an American teenager of 1950s. Originally written as a critical novel to show teenage rebellion, isolation, dissatisfaction and sarcasm, it is read by the target reader with sympathy for Holden and criticism of his society. The words *goddam*, *damn*, *hell*, *bastard*, *sonuvabitch*, *for Chrissake*, *for God’s sake*, *Jesus Christ* which are obvious in every sentence of Selinger’s Holden were either softened, neutralized by translator’s euphemistic language or omitted completely, since such expressions should not be peculiar to a schoolboy aged 15-16 in Azerbaijan. Thus his manner of speech was adapted to the cultural and moral standards of the Azerbaijani reader:

Original: ‘God damn it.’ He was sore as hell. He was really furious. ‘You always do everything backasswards.’ He looked at me. ‘No wonder you’re flunking the hellout of here,’ he said. ‘You don’t do one damn thing the way you’re supposed to. I mean it. Not one damn thing.’

‘All right, give it back to me, then’, I said. I went over and pulled it right out of hisgoddam hand. Then I tore it up.

‘What the hellja do that for?’ he said (Salinger, 1951)

Translation: *Başın batsın sənin. – Bərk dilxor oldu. Özündən çıxdı. – Hər işi tərsinə görürsən. – Dönüb*

üzümə baxdı. – Elə yaxşı eləyib səni bayıra atıblar, – dedi. – Heç vaxt heç bir işi adam kimi görmürsən. Heç vaxt. Heç bir işi!

– Nə deyirəm. Onda onu ver bəri, – dedim. Ona yaxınlaşdım. Qəfil dartıb əlindən aldım. Hirsimdən cırıq-cırıq elədim.

– Neyləyirsən, niyə cırırsan, – dedi (Selincer, 1951)

Back translation: *'God damn you'. He became dejected. He flew into a rage. 'You do everything backwards'. He turned and looked at me. 'They did well by expelling you from here'. You never do anything decently. Never. Nothing'!*

'All right, give it back to me then', I said. I came up to him. I suddenly pulled it out of his hand. I furiously tore it up.

'What are you doing, why are you tearing it'?'-he said

Such an approach of the translator can be justified by cultural and moral standards, religious affiliation, as well as the unacceptability of such an “openness” by public. Another important fact which worth mentioning is the already existing Russian translation of the same novel, which was translated by Rita Rait-Kovaleva, a well-known Russian translator and author, as “*Над пропастью во ржи*” (*Over the Abyss in the Rye*). Despite the fact that Tehran Valiyev translated from English, he tried to be loyal to the Russian translation rather than original, due to the above mentioned cultural, political, ideological and religious factors. Indeed, most probably, he did not wanted to deviate from the precedent “standardized” “domesticated” translation. Taking into account that readers had already been acquainted with Kovaleva’s translation, Tehran Valiyev tried to remain faithful to the “censorial restrictions” of the Soviet totalitarian regime.

However paradoxical it may appear, despite ideological adaptations and overuse of “domestication”, such translations today tend to be deemed high-quality and any attempt to re-translate them is met by criticism. Domesticated translations communicated well in the target language. The challenge of retranslating the fiction works “stereotyped” by the readers as an absolute equivalent of the original can be justified by the fear of deviation from the existing “recognized”, translations. Avoiding any rewrite or retranslation, the publishers today confine their publications to reprint. Some publishing houses relate this situation with the financial issues, while others feel reluctant to readdress the already translated texts. However, the comparative-contrastive analysis, employed to study such translations in terms of the strategies adopted, reveal that the Iron Curtain has had an adverse impact on the reception of the world literature.

3. Retranslation Practice in Azerbaijan

Careful analysis of the translations of the Soviet period shows that due to the known political, ideological, and totalitarian rules, as well as inevitable interference in the translations made not only from the second language (here Russian), but also those made from original show significant linguistic deviation, modification, adaptation, and omissions. Taken this fact into account, the need of retranslation seems to be inescapable.

Retranslation means a second or further translation of a source text into the same target language (Paloposki & Koskinen, 2010). Advocates of this hypothesis claim that first translations are poor, whereas subsequent translations are better, since they can eliminate shortcomings and faults by transferring true essence of the source text (Sarajeva, 2003). Scholars explain the need for retranslations from different viewpoints. Shifts in political and ideological attitudes, changing perceptions of the target readers (they may find old translations outdated), and willingness on a part of a translator to produce a new version of the existing target text can be reasons why retranslation is necessary (Gurchaglar, 2009).

While focusing on the reasons for the production of retranslation in Azerbaijan, we found out that the main reason is the impact Soviet ideology on old translation. Overdomesticated translation was allowed and tolerated for the censorial appeasement.

Although retranslation is not widely practised in Azerbaijan due to reluctance on a part of translators to retranslate already existing translations, publishers’ unwillingness to finance such attempts, and above all, the stereotyped immunity of such translations, we can see some examples in the poetry translation. Referring to Samed Vurgun’s (famous Azerbaijani poet-translator) retranslation of Pushkin’s “Eugenie Onegin”, Hamlet Isakhanli states that it is quite natural for a poet-translator to return to its translation repeatedly because of the never-ending urge to improve the text of translation (Isaxanli, 2014). According to Venuti (Venuti, 1995), some retranslations may originate purely from a translator’s personal appreciation of a text. This situation is termed by Pym (1998) as “active retranslations”, the cause of which is suggested to be “disagreements over translation

strategies” in addition to a translator’s personal appreciation of the original work.

A recent research conducted on the different translations (retranslations) of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* revealed that those made from Russian lack in terms of semantic adequacy and loyalty to Shakespeare. In her monograph *Hamlet in the Azerbaijani language*, Esmiralda Rahimli classified those translation on the principles and stages of “adaptation” (*Hamlet* translated by Abdurrahim bey Hagverdiyev from Russian), “equivalency” (*Hamlet* translated by Jafar Jabbarly from Russian), “standardization” (*Hamlet* translated by Talat Ayyubov from Russian) and “adequacy” (*Hamlet* translated by Sabir Mustafa from English) (Rahimli, 2013). *Hamlet* translated from English by a famous translator and poet Sabir Mustafa is regarded as the most adequately rendered target text. Sabir Mustafa has translated Shakespeare’s other tragedies “Othello”, “Romeo and Juliet”, “King Lear”, “Macbeth”, as well as his sonnets into Azerbaijani. Sabir Mustafa’s talent and close acquaintance with Shakespeare’s literary treasure and great dramatic mind, as well as proficiency in English and Azerbaijani enabled him to recreate the best equivalents of those tragedies.

4. Conclusion

Theoretically regarded as a purely linguistic practice, translation, in fact, combine all kinds of historical, cultural, political, and ideological concepts and notions. As a global bridge that connects people, nations and cultures, translation has always been used as a very effective tool to share new ideas, to propagate dominating ideology and to denounce opposite regimes.

Strategies and approaches adopted by translators are not limited to their own choices. Historical, political, socio-cultural, and economic factors play an important role in translation. Translation should not necessarily supposed to be better than the original text. It must meet expectations of the target audience by providing adequate rendering of the source text, as well as preserving the image, uniqueness and foreignness of the author in the target literature. Translator’s religious affiliations should not be overlooked which necessitates the use of euphemisms in the target text.

Careful analysis of the Soviet translations shows that cultural and ideological differences, inadequate rendering of the cultural words inherent in the source culture and language, as well as overdomestication of the original, “clearance” of the intrinsic elements led to the “oversimplification” of the target texts. Guided by the principles of naturalness, fluency and accuracy translators of the Soviet period tried to remove any foreign, exotic element of the source text to make it readable in the target language. Nevertheless, shifts in the political and cultural attitudes, perceptions and concepts necessitate retranslation of the ideologically adapted literary texts in Azerbaijan.

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