STRATEGIES FOR TRANSLATING POETRY

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Introduction: *The most contentious area of translation science is poetic translation. There are many different theories about its likelihood and impossibility. The majority of them concur that the translation of poetry is hampered by the loss of aesthetic value. However, this value can still be maintained if the translator employs effective methods for finishing the job. In addition to adhering to the processes of selection and arrangement and their principles (proposed by Nida, 1990) on the macro and micro levels of the poetic texts, strategies of aesthetic accommodation (proposed by Aiwei 2005) combined with the strategy of compensation (proposed by Eesa, 2006) help to accomplish this task. By using these approaches when translating any poetic material, the poet would be able to maintain the work's overall aesthetic worth of order to test the viability of using these techniques while translating poetry, they are applied to an excerpt from the first section of Burnt Norton (the first quartet of T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets). On an excerpt from Burnt Norton's second part, other methods based on the selection and arrangement of factors at the macro and micro levels are used. However, due to the extensive space they would require if applied, the principles of selection and arrangement are not used in this study.*

Key words: *poetic translation, rhyme, verse, rhythm, blank verse, free-verse, stanza.*

METHODS

The challenge of translating poetry stems from the fact that it is thought to be the most challenging literary form to do so because of the numerous linguistic elements of sound, rhyme, and meter that are challenging to take into account (Newmark, 2004:9). The recreation of the original work's style is required and doable, but it is a difficult undertaking to complete, according to Xiaoshu (2003:3).In order for the reader of the translation to be inspired and amused aesthetically in the same way the native reader is by the original, literary (and poetic) translation must thus faithfully recreate the original artistic images in another language. As a result, poetic translation is a subject that is constantly up for debate.

Many translators and theorists are skeptic about the translatability of poetry .They have different reasoning for that, but, they all agree with Frost's statement that "poetry is what is lost in translation", which became

a cliché for those who disavow the translation of poetry.

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The ability of poetry to be translated is disputed by many translators and philosophers. They all agree with Frost's aphorism that "poetry is what is lost in translation," which has become a catchphrase for people who oppose the translation of poetry, although having various explanations for why. Poetry is by definition untranslatable, according to Jacobson (in Shulte & Biguenet, 1992:151), and only creative transposition is possible. This transposition could be inter semiotic (from one sign system into another), intralingual (from one poetic form into another), interlingual (from one language into another), or intralingual (from one poetic form into another). According to Bonnyfoy (ibid., 186), the difficulty of translating poetry is due to the numerous paradoxes the translator encounters and is unable to resolve without sacrificing too much. Benjamin's theory about how content and language (form) interact differently in the original and in the translation provides another explanation for this untranslatable quality. While the translation's form envelops the content like a royal robe with ample folds, the original's form and content form a certain unity similar to a fruit and its skin.

RESULTS

Someone translates poetry and someone reads translated poetry, and that is more than enough. Even for poetry, the translation dilemma is either creating a text enabling a reader to access the original, or creating a beautiful poetic text inspired by the original. Therefore, it is better make some distinctions on the aim pursued by translating poetry.

It can be argued that the whole field of poetry translation is still in its infancy at the theoretical level despite three millennia of practice. The past and present states of the theory regarding the translation of poetry is well summarised in *The Encyclopaedia of Literary Translation* (1998) under the headings *The Poetics of Translation* and *Poetry Translation*. There is no need to repeat these excellent summaries written by Gentzler and Venuti respectively, but instead, it will be of greater relevance to examine the language of discourse in this field. In short, it can almost be said 'anything goes in the theory of poetic discourse translation as there are distinguished theorists, literati and poets who represent more or less every conceivable stance on this most difficult of topics. Based on Lefevere (1975), Bassnett (1991) list of the various possible approaches still applies:

- phonemic translation (imitation of ST sounds);
- literal translation (cf. Nabokov);
- metrical translation (imitation of metre of ST);
- prose translation (rendering as much sense as possible);
- rhymed translation (added constraints of rhyme and metre);
- blank verse translation (no constraint of rhyme but still one of structure);
- interpretation (complete change of form and/or imitation).
(Abridged from Bassnett. 1991: 81-82)

DISCUSSION

More detailed examples of these various stances will be given in the course of this introduction. There has been much written about poetry translation by poets, translators and literary critics, but there has been little written in a systematic way. The wide range of stances on this issue is also well summarized by Holmes (1978) who also reflects some of the vehemence with which these views are held by the various parties involved:

What should the verse form of a metapoem be? There is, surely, no other problem of translation that has generated so much heat, and so little light, among the normative critics. Poetry, says one, should be translated into prose. No, says a second, it should be translated into verse, for in prose its very essence is lost. By all means into verse, and into the form of the original, urges a third. Verse into verse, fair enough, says a fourth, but God save us from Homer in hexameters. (Holmes 1978: 94)

In the history of translation and literature, each school of thought has distinguished representatives. It could also be added that the language of discourse has both a moral and absolutist tone which excludes open debate on these matters. It will be useful to begin with the first category mentioned by Holmes (1970) which refers to those poets and theoreticians who are convinced that all

poetry in all cases (such is the universalist form of their discourse) should be translated into prose.

The literary critic and translator, John Middleton Murry (1923) is a vigorous supporter of the 'poetry-into-prose' school:

Poetry ought always to be rendered into prose. Since the aim of the translator should be to present the original as exactly as possible, no fetters of rhyme or metre should be imposed to hamper this difficult labour. Indeed they make it impossible. (Murry 1923: 129)

The argument is based on moral exhortations as illustrated by the emphasis. Similarly, the more recent critic, writer and translator Nabokov, whose essay "Problems of Translation: Onegin in English" originally published in 1955, quoted in full in Venuti (2000), takes an equally extreme and absolutist position on this topic. His justification of this stance is based on an uncompromising literalist view of translation:

The term "free translation" smacks of knavery and tyranny. It is when the translator sets out to render the "spirit" - not the textual sense - that he begins to traduce the author. The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful that the prettiest paraphrase. (Nabokov 2000: 71)

By his use of the verb traduce, Nabokov implies a severe moral condemnation for the 'free' translator, possibly as an echo of the well-known Italian dictum to the effect that traduttore (to translate) equals traditore (to betray).The same tone of moral indignation concerning 'free' translators pervades the whole essay:

The person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language has only one duty to perform, and this is to produce with absolute exactitude the whole text and nothing but the text. (Venuti 2000: 77)

The phrase "the whole text and nothing but the text" is redolent of the oath to be sworn before a jury: "the whole truth and nothing but the truth". This is to imply that free translation is not only betrayal but is also a form of perjury.

It is, however, not very well known that the poet Robert Browning's views on poetry anticipate those of the 'literalist' school. Pound and Benjamin also tend towards this approach to translation where the target language is sometimes violated to preserve the rugged and raw nature of the original.

In between the two extremes of translation into prose versus translation into verse, there are, however, other opinions which include grey areas such as those of Matthew Arnold (1909), whose essay "On Translating Homer" originally appeared in 1861, is a slightly less categorical supporter of the poetry-into-prose school since he restricts his dogmatic ban only to the 'great works' of literature on account of the variety entailed in such literary monuments:

There are great works composed of parts so disparate that one translator is not likely to have the requisite gifts for poetically rendering all of them. Such are

the works of Shakespeare and Goethe's Faust; and these it is best to attempt to render in prose only. (Arnold 1909: 274)

Although Arnold's arguments are consistent in theory, they are rather weak in practice as they involve preferring an obscure French prose version of Shakespeare to the universally acclaimed Schlegel-Tieck translations. Similarly, he supports a very weak English prose version of Goethe's Faust.

At the other extreme, Alexander Fraser Tytler (1791), who was one of the early theoreticians to discuss the problem of poetry translation into English, takes a diametrically opposite stance to both the translation-into-prose school with an equally confident dogmatism. Tytler asserts:

To attempt, therefore, a translation of lyric poem into prose, is the most absurd of all undertakings; for those very characters of the original which are essential to it, and which constitute its highest beauties, if transferred to a prose translation, become unpardonable blemishes. (Tytler 1791: 111)

Again as with Nabokov, opprobrium is supported by ethical threats with Tytler's use of the adjective unpardonable. Tytler also adds the threat of ridicule to possible opponents of stance by his use of the phrase most absurd. Sometimes, even national prejudices are invoked to support extreme views on poetry translation as in the case of the poet Coleridge:

 I do not admit the argument for prose translations. I would, in general, rather see verse in so capable a language as ours. The French cannot help themselves, of course, with such a language as theirs. (Quoted in Selver 1966: 13)

CONCLUSION

To sum up, it can be concluded that the complexity of poetic translation is mainly due to the specifics of the poetic text, in which the figurative basis and form are directly related to the culture and to the peculiarities of the language structure. We all know Umberto Eco's quotation that translation is the art of failure. The question is whether it is preferable to sacrifice elements of content or elements of form for its sake.

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