

PROSPECTIVITY AND RETROSPECTIVITY AS POLARITY ITEMS IN TRANSLATION

Titela VÎLCEANU

Introduction

A broad intellectual topography of translation theories allows us to go beyond more traditionally defined zones (for instance, Holmes' (1972) far-reaching tripartite division of translation studies into *descriptive*, *theoretical* and *applied* ones) to an osmotic model, incorporating comparative literature, linguistics, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, ethnography, sociology, cultural studies and communication sciences. Furthermore, Holmes' terminological distinction between *translating* (understood as the process of translation) and *translation* (the product) seems to have become blurred due the fact that the product dimension has gained increased importance, being the most visible part of translation as design-oriented, precise and measurable (complying with specification).

If we no longer want to entertain a fiction, we must be fully aware that translation is not a *mimetic form*, but an *analogical* one (Holmes 1988: 26) since it "*cannot double up with its parent text*" (Hermans in Riccardi 2002: 11), it cannot be a franchised copy of the donor text because of the translator's more or less visible hybrid positioning and face saving strategies. In this respect, Hervey and Higgins (1992) claim that the translator makes two sets of reasoned (ethical and aesthetic, we should add) decisions: *strategic decisions* (related to the global reading of the text, in a skopos-oriented mindset) and *decisions of detail* (during the close reading of the text, dealing with manageable parts, with text and context specificities). Baker (2006) sees the translators engaged in the "*active processes of contextualisation*", recognising the dynamic, fluid nature of context, empowering translators and translation theorists to actively negotiate meaning. She strongly argues that the cultural turn in translation should be envisaged as enabling rather than disabling:

instead of treating context as a constraint, a set of restrictions on what we can or cannot achieve in translation and other communicative events, and setting out to specify the numerous facets of that constraint, it might ultimately be more productive to recognize context as a resource, something that we selectively and strategically construct as we engage in any act of communication, including the act of translation. (Baker 2006: 332)

House (2006) broadly equates contemporary translation theory to an eclectic re-contextualisation theory and an *ex post facto* re-creative act, which we further define as context sensitivity and acquisition of a repertoire of re-usable strategies in order to achieve and operationalize equivalence at the structural and functional levels, pragmatic equivalence being given priority. The translator is not a mere skilled worker and translation unfolds the implicit meaning, the socio-cultural matrix in which the text is embedded (peritextually) and the situational context (ultimately reduced to the readership's structures of expectation). The translator should master top-down and bottom-up information processing strategies (action-oriented approach) according to particular needs and interests.

This requirement does not only enhance personal and professional growth, but it is also connected to quality assurance in translation as meeting both internal (the translator gains viable insights in the process of translation) and external requirements (mostly related to translation as product to be delivered on the market). Hence, the translator's choices are to be considered “*a hierarchy of demands on equivalence*” (House 2006: 345) and they are accountable in point of cost-effectiveness (efficiency) and effectiveness.

Mainstream literature reduces the translator's strategic choices to the dichotomy *author-centred translation* (retrospectivity) vs. *readership-oriented translation* (prospectivity). Crudely put, literary translation is within the scope of retrospectivity whereas the translation of survival literature (informative and vocative texts) pertains to prospectivity. More recent approaches promote the translator's *divided loyalties*, i.e. the translator's positioning and repositioning while the translation is unfolding. Admittedly, prospectivity and retrospectivity seem not to be mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, at the global level of the text, one of the strategies prevails – consequently, prospectivity and retrospectivity may be considered polarity items in translation in spite of the occurrence of reversed polarity.

1. Situated and transferred practice

In what follows, we shall evaluate the prospective and retrospective policies in rendering linguistic variations in the translation of David Lodge's *Paradise News* into Romanian. We shall start from the assumption that both in monolingual and bi-/ multilingual communication situations, participants have at their disposal a compartmentalised and fluid repertoire made up of linguistic variations (conventions pertaining to register (field), mode (oral vs written communication) and tenor (level of formality). To a large extent, linguistic variations are equated in translation by compromise or by compensation strategies.

1.1. Dialectal variation

1.1.1. Geographical dialect

The source (literary) text circulates lexical items belonging to British and American dialects, which are meant to generate a clash of cultures. We witness a translation loss in this respect, motivated by the fact that the Romanian dialects (one within the Romanian borders, the others outside them) do not hold the same importance as the two English dialects (the Romanian dialects outside the Romanian borders are spoken by a small community, they are their mother tongue, but they are not granted the status of official language of the country). Besides, to our best knowledge, there are few reference materials on Romanian dialects, the translators being forced to neutralise such linguistic variation.

A. lexical marks

- „Eighteen and a half hours cooped up in one of those oversized sardine **cans**? (p.5) (American English)
 - Optsprezece ore și jumătate ferecați într-o **conservă** de sardine de-aia mare? (p.11) -
- „Are you **kidding**? I can't even go home to my **apartment**” (p. 27) (American English)
 - **Glumesti**? Nu mă pot duce nici acasă, în **apartamentul** meu. (p. 31)
- „Tess is always nagging me to sell up and move into a **flat**” (p. 42) (British English)
 - Tess mă bate la cap să o vând și să mă mut într-un **apartament**. (p. 44)
- ... **motorway** pile-ups (p. 34), ... closer to the **freeway**. (p. 116) (American English)
 - ... **autostrăzi** rulante foarte aglomerate (p. 36), ... mai aproape de **autostradă**. (p. 109)
 - ... and for tickets in the **Underground**. (p. 40) (British English)
 - ... la fel și la biletele de **metrou**. (p. 42)
- They know how people going on **vacation** are supposed to behave. (p. 77)

- (American English)
 Ei știu cum trebuie să se comporte oamenii în **concediu**. (p. 77)
 ➤ The night air at Honolulu airport.... with a hint of **petrol** (p. 83)
 (American English)
 Cu noaptea de pe aeroportul Honolulu...cu un ușor iz de **petrol** (p. 80)
 ➤ „**You guys** must be exhausted, huh?” (p. 87), „Seems a nice **chap**.” (p. 110), „Well, I’ll leave **you folks** alone.” (American English)
 - Bănuiesc că sunteți extenuați, nu? (p. 83) (omission), - Pare **băiat** de treabă. (p. 103), - Păi, eu vă las. (p. 111) (omission)
 ... me and another British **bloke** (p. 247) (British English)
 ... cu **englezul** ăstălalt (p. 223)
 ➤ ... parked at the **kerb**... (p. 88) (American English)
 ...parcat la **bordură**... (p. 85)
 ... both **pavements, or sidewalks**, as Mrs Knoepfelmacher called them... (p. 91) (American English vs. British English)
 ... **trotuarele** de pe ambele părți ale șoselei... (p. 87) (omission)
 ➤ „I didn’t ask for a **bloody wake up call!**” (p. 110) (British English)
 - N-am cerut să fim trezite, **fir-ar a dracului de treabă!** (p. 106)
 „I can’t tell you how much I miss the New England **fall**....here is blossom **all fuckin’ year**” (p. 176) (American English)
 - Nici nu pot să-ți spun cât imi lipsește **toamna** din New England....Aici pomii sunt în floare tot timpul anului, **fir-ar a dracului de treabă!** (p. 162)
 ➤ But paying off the **cab**... (p. 115) (American English)
 Și plăti **taxiul** cu ultimii dolari... (p. 108)
 ➤ As she stepped out of the **elevator**... (p. 115) (American English)
 Când ieși din **lift**... (p. 108)
 ➤ „...But lovers call each other „**darling**” or „**sweetheart**” or something like that, don’t they? And there’s an American word...”
 „**Honey**?” (p. 309) (British English vs. American English)
 - Dar alții ca noi își spun „**dragă**” , „**iubitule**” sau ceva de genul ăsta, nu? Și mai e un cuvânt american...
 - „**Scumpule**”? (p. 279)
 ➤ „No, we don’t, **I’m afraid**”. (phatic language)
 „You should stop saying that, Bernard”.
 „Saying what?”
 „**I’m afraid**”. (p. 281)
 - Nu, **mă tem** că nu prea ne-nțelegem.
 - Ar fi cazul să nu mai spui chestia asta, Bernard.
 - Ce anume?
 „**Mă tem**”. (p. 255)

B. phonological/ spelling marks – there are instances of intra-dialectal variation (within the borders of UK) and inter-dialectal variation (British vs American English), which are neutralised in translation.

- „What d’you take me for, a **robot**?” He pronounced this word in a **perceptibly Irish accent**, as „**row-boat**” (p. 15)
 - Ce sunt eu, **robot**? Rostea cuvântul cu **un pronunțat accent irlandez**. (p.20)
 ➤ „Some people think it’s gotten tacky, but I think it’s still **kinda fun**” (p. 90) (American English)
 - Unii zic că s-a năclăit, dar mie tot **mi se pare** amuzantă. (p. 86)
 ➤ „**How ya doin’, sir?**” (p. 101) (American English)

- *Cum va simțiti, domnule?* (p. 95)

C. morpho-syntactic marks

➤ „*I was searching for me purse*” (p. 20), „*Me feet were killin’ me*” (p. 94) (Irish dialect)

- *Mă scotoceam după portofel.* (p.24), *Îs mort de picioare.* (p. 77)

The choice of the verbal form *Is* seems rather inappropriate, representing regional variation – used in the western part of Romania. There are no grounds for equating the Irish marks to this Romanian regional variation, and it is inconsistent with the general strategy used by the translators, i.e. neutralisation.

➤ „*Some people think it’s gotten tacky, but I think it’s still kinda fun*” (p. 90), „*You wanna ride with him?*” (p. 105), „*You gonna sue the driver?*” (p. 198) (American English)

- *Unii zic că s-a năclăit, dar mie tot mi se pare amuzantă.* (p. 86), - *Vreți să veniți cu el?* (p. 99), - *Si, ce faceți, îl dați în judecată pe conducătorul auto?* (p. 181)

1.1.2. Temporal dialect (lexically marked) – the referent designated by the lexeme *cable* and *telegrama*, respectively, is out of date in both cultures (a case of cultural symmetry).

➤ „*Western Union delivered a cable for you this afternoon,*” she said. (p. 279)

- *Cei de la Western Union ți-au adus o telegramă azi după masă, spuse ea.* (p. 176)

1.1.3. Social dialect - mainly marked at the phonological level by ellision; if we give credit to deficit theory, such marks are an index of social insecurity.

➤ *I ask you – it must take’em all day to get there.* (p.5), *Must be mad ... Look at’em!*” (p.5), „*Tell’em a mile off*” (p. 13), *Me feet were killin’ me*” (p. 94), „*Only this fella’ exasperates me, treatin’ me like a child*” (p. 52)

- *Pariez că le ia o zi întreagă să ajungă acolo!* (p. 11), *Toți sunt într-o doagă, ascultă-mă ce-ți spun!* (p. 11), - *Ți-i recunosc de la o poștă!* (p. 18), - *Îs mort de picioare.* (p. 77)

All are instances of neutralisation by equivalence to standard pronunciation, - *Numa’ că tipu’ ăsta mă exasperează, parc-aș fi prunc.* (compensation strategy due to numerical reasons – ellision occurs to *numa’* – corresponding to the English *only*, which is unaffected in the source text, to compensate for *treatin’*, which is neutralised in translation. Again, the translators’s choice is criticisable: the Romanian word *prunc* pertains to regional variation – encountered in the western part of Romania, whereas *child* in the original text is neutral.

1. 2. Register-related variation

1.2.1. Field – equivalence is complete.

➤ „*to purchase, sell, bargain, or contract for, encumber, hypothecate, or alienate any property, real, personal or mixed, tangible or intangible...*” (p. 198) (legal language)

„*achiziție, vânzare, negociere, contractare, datorii, ipotecă, înstrăinare a proprietății, imobiliar, personal sau în devălmășie, tangibil sau intangibil...*” (p. 181)

➤ „*Whoso readeth, let her understand.*” (p. 237) (religion)

Fie să priceapă cea care va citi. (p. 215)

1.2.2. Mode – indexed at the lexical level, overlapping with dialectal variation and tenor. These marks are neutralised in translation:

➤ „*You guys must be exhausted, huh?*” (p. 87) (oral mode)

- *Bănuiesc că sunteți extenuați, nu?* (p. 83) (omission)

➤ „*I didn’t ask for a bloody wake up call!*” (p. 110), „*I can’t tell you how much I miss the New England fall....here is blossom all fuckin’ year*” (p. 176) (oral mode)

- *N-am cerut să fim trezite, fir-ar a dracului de treabă!* (p. 106), - *Nici nu pot să-ți spun cât imi lipsește toamna din New England....Aici pomii sunt în floare tot timpul anului, fir-ar a dracului de treabă!* (p. 162)

The Romanian rendering does not observe the principle of naturalness as *da-o dracului de treaba!* is more frequent.)

1.2.3. Tenor

A. lexical features

➤ „My colleague Mr Connolly will be *glad to assist* you with your bags” (p.6) (formal language)

- *Colegul meu, domnul Connolly, o să vă ajute imediat la valize.* (p. 12)

The Romanian verbal form is not the counterpart of the English Future Simple Form – it equates the „Be going to” Future, and it is a mark of the informal style. To comply with the formal style features, we suggest: *va fi încântat să vă ajute la bagaje.*

➤ *Make a good impression, otherwise he might write something **nasty** about you”.* (p.7), *„Tess is always **nagging** me to sell up and move into a flat”* (p. 42), *„All I need to settle is a **fag** or two”* (p. 52), *Roxy said **it was a knockout.**”* (p. 172 (colloquial items)

*Să faci impresie bună, altfel te trezești că scrie ceva **nasol** despre tine.* (p. 13), *Tess **mă bate la cap** să o vând și să mă mut într-un apartament.* (p. 44), - *Tot ce-mi trebuie’, e un **trabuc**, două.* (p. 53), - *Roxy mi-a spus că e **zdrobitoare.*** (p. 159)

Mă bate la cap does not pertain to colloquial language, *mă cicălește* is a more appropriate solution. *Trabuc* may be sanctioned as a referential error since the context makes reference to *cigarettes* not to *cigars*; furthermore, *trabuc* is a neutral item and the translation should read as *Tot ce-mi trebuie’, e să trag un **fum** sau două. Zdrobitoare* with reference to *rochia* is utterly inappropriate, the accurate rendering being *Rochia te dă pe spate.*

➤ *... and every blessed item of **booze and grub**...* (p. 46) (slang)

*... si toate felurile de **haleală** și **pileală** în el...* (p. 47) (optimal equivalence)

➤ *„It’s a very nice dress.”* (p. 172) (neutral style)

- *E o rochie deosebit de draguță.* (p. 159)

The Romanian maximizer *deosebit de* characterises the formal style and it should be replaced by *foarte*, which is a neutral item.

B. morpho-syntactic features

➤ *Must be mad ... Look at’em!”* (p.5) (elliptical sentence characterising colloquial language)

Toți sunt într-o doagă, ascultă-mă ce-ți spun! (p. 11)

Equivalence occurs via a compensation strategy at the lexical level, where **mad** is rendered by *sint într-o doaga*.

➤ *„Get off it”, says Trevor* (p.8). (The use of phrasal verbs is ascribed to informal and colloquial style)

- *Nu zău, comentează Trevor.* (p. 13) (Compensation is activated once again: English phrasal verbs do not have direct corresponding constructions in Romanian. We suggest another rendering: *Nu mai spune* to have a verbal phrase in translation, too.)

Conclusions

Translation does not take place in a social vacuum; instead it underpins accommodation work, complying with linguistic and cultural norms (language use) at all levels of analysis: morpho-syntactic, semantic and pragmatic, so as to acquire *ecological validity* (Dimitrova 2005), i.e. real life feasibility.

Notes

1. In time the (potential) product, and especially its (prospective) position and function in the target system, should be assigned precedence over the process (Toury 1986: 1121).

2. Importance is attached to equivalence in non-Western theories of translation. For instance, translation is identified with *rupantar* (change in form) and with *anuvad* (speaking after) in India, with

tarjama (biography) in the Arab world, with *fan yi* (turning over) in China (Tymoczko in Hermans 2006).

3. Parallel terminology also includes: *formal equivalence vs dynamic equivalence* (Nida 1964), *textual equivalence vs formal correspondence* (Catford, 1965), *formal correspondence vs dynamic equivalence* (Nida and Taber 1969), *semantic equivalence vs pragmatic equivalence*, *overt translation vs covert translation* (House 1977) *semantic equivalence vs functional equivalence* (Bell 1984), *exoticizing vs naturalizing* (Holmes 1988), *semantic translation vs communicative translation* (Newmark, 1988), *the translator's visibility vs the translator's invisibility*, *domesticating vs foreignizing translation* (Venuti 1995).

References

- Anderman, G. and M. Rogers (eds) (2002) *Translation Today. Trends and Perspectives*. London: Multilingual Matters.
- Apter, E. (2006) *The Translation Zone: A new Comparative literature*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Baker, M. (2006) "Contextualization in Translator- and Interpreter- Mediated Events" in *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38, pp. 321-337.
- Bassnett, S. and H. Trivedi (1999) *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Dimitrova, B. E. (2005) *Expertise and Explicitation in the Translation Process*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Gentzler, E. (2001) (2nd ed) *Contemporary Translation Theories*. London: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Hervey, S. and I. Higgins (1992) *Thinking Translation. A Course in Translation Method: French to English*. London: Routledge.
- Holmes, J. (1988) *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- House, J. (2006) "Text and Context in Translation" in *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38, pp. 338-358.
- Lodge, D. (1992) *Paradise News*. London: Penguin Books.
- Lodge, D. (2003) *Vesti din paradis* (transl. Raluca Mihail and Radu Paraschivescu), Iasi: Polirom.
- Riccardi, A. (ed) (2002) *Translation Studies. Perspectives on an Emerging Discipline*. Cambridge: CUP.