The Trajectory of Literary Translation: From Interpretation to (Re)writing and a New Life

GERFLINT

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Le processus de la traduction littéraire

Résumé

Tous les actes concernant le transfert/la transformation d'un texte littéraire produit dans une langue/culture donnée en une autre langue/culture se déroulent dans le domaine de la traduction littéraire. Nous pouvons déterminer quatre phases distinctives dans le processus de la traduction littéraire: choisir le texte qui va être traduit, charger un traducteur littéraire de le traduire, créer un nouveau texte en langue d'arrivée, introduire ce nouveau texte dans le système littéraire de la langue d'arrivée en jouant le rôle d'intermédiaire entre deux cultures différentes. En fait, les propriétés intrinsèques de ces quatre phases peuvent être étudiées dans le cadre des trois questions posées afin de formuler des réflexions théoriques et pratiques sur la traduction littéraire: Qu'est-ce qu'un texte original? Comment traduisons-nous? Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction? Les réponses multiples à ces questions fondamentales fournies par les théoriciens et praticiens de la traduction nous permettent de formuler une nouvelle perspective pour comprendre et interpréter la nature compliquée de la traduction littéraire.

Mots-clés: traduction littéraire, traducteur littéraire, texte original, réflexions théoriques et pratiques

Edebiyat Çevirisi Süreci

Özet

Öykü, roman, şiir, oyun, deneme gibi metin türlerinin başka bir dile aktarımı söz konusu olduğunda kendimizi doğrudan edebiyat çevirisinin alanında buluruz. Bu alanda çalışmak, belli bir dil ve kültür ortamında üretilmiş bir metni başka bir dil ve kültür ortamına taşımak gibi çok genel bir ifadeyle adlandırabileceğimiz bir işlemler toplamını edebiyat çevirisi alanında gerçekleştirmeyi denemek anlamına gelir. Edebiyat çevirisi sürecini dört aşamada ele alabiliriz: çevirisi yapılmak üzere bir kaynak metnin seçimi, bu çeviri için yetkin bir edebiyat çevirmeninin görevlendirilmesi, söz konusu kaynak metnin çevirmen tarafından erek dilde yeniden yazılmış bir metne dönüştürülmesi, erek metnin erek kültür dizgesinin bir parçası olması ve yeni okurlarla tanışması. Edebiyat

çevirisi bu aşamalar bağlamında ele alındığında üç soru ön plana çıkar: Kaynak metin nedir? Nasıl çeviri yapıyoruz? Çeviri metin nedir? Bu sorulara yüzyıllar boyunca çeviri kuramcılarının ve edebiyat çevirmenlerinin verdikleri farklı yanıtlar üzerine düşünmek, edebiyat çevirisinin karmaşık doğasıyla ilgili gerçekçi ve yenilikçi bir bakış açısı geliştirmemize yardımcı olabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: edebiyat çevirisi, edebiyat çevirmeni, özgün metin, kuram ve uygulama

Abstract

All acts related with the transfer/transformation of a work of literature written in a partciular language/culture into another language/culture take place in the field of literary translation. It is possible to divide literary translation into four distinctive phases: the selection of the work to be translated, the commissioning of its translation to a literary translator, its actual translation into the target language and the introduction of the translation into a new literary system including its reception by a new set of readers. A discussion of the various answers provided by translation scholars and literary translators to three main questions in relation to the phases of literary translation -What is a source text? How do we translate? What is a translation?- might provide us an illuminating perspective to understand and interpret the complicated nature of literary translation.

Key words: literary translation, literary translator, original text, theory and practice

The decision of transforming any work of fiction written in a particular language into another language requires entering the field of literary translation and performing within it. The transmission of a work of fiction into another language and culture is, in fact, the end result of a series of translational operations conducted by the people involved in the act of literary translation such as publishers, translators, and editors. And it goes without saying that these people act in a particular environment shaped by the current dynamics of literary translation in a specific place and time in order to reproduce/rewrite an original work by inserting it into the network of possible relationships which are to be established within the receiving cultural system. The original work thus becomes another "original" work in its new literary milieu via the various relationships it forms both with the works written in the receiving language and the ones translated from foreign languages as demonstrated by Itamar Even-Zohar in polysystem theory (2000: 192-197).

The adventure of literary translation has a starting point as well as an end point. A publisher or editor selects a work to be translated into the receiving language in accordance with the policy of the publishing house, the expectations of the possible readers

and the commercial conditions of the present day publishing market. The selection of the work to be translated is generally followed by the commisioning of the translating job to a preferably competent and eminent translator. As soon as the translator submits his/her translation to the publishing house, the editorial work begins. The first draft of the translation is meticulously read, revised and edited in most cases only by the editor himself/herself; however, depending on the working policy of the publishing house, the editor might cooperate with the translator as well before making the first draft of the translation ready for publication. Advertisements and reviews in literary magazines or book supplements of the daily newspapers accompanied by audio-visual appearances and commentaries in on-line media help the translated work to be comfortably and successfully incorporated into the literary world of the receiving culture. Hence, the translated work becomes a new "original" in the receiving cultural environment after being read, interpreted and commented on by a new group of readers belonging to a different culture than its native one.

The process of literary translation can be divided roughly into the following phases: selection of the original work to be translated, the commissioning of its translation to a qualifed translator, its actual translation into the receiving language and finally the introduction of the translation into a new literary world and its reception by the new world readers. As a person who has taken part in different stages of literary trans- lation from English and French into Turkish by assuming the role of a translator, editor, reviewer of translated books, translation instructor and researcher for approximately two decades, I have been asking myself several questions on the nature of literary translation in order to comprehend it from a wider perspective shaped by both repre- sentative practices and significant theories. When I attempted to list the questions which came to my mind on the nature, aim and methods of translating, I recognized that these questions revolved around three main headings: What is a source text? How do we translate? What is a translation? The answers that I've been providing to these questions have been inevitably changing in accordance with my widening practical and theoretical involvement in and interpretation of the field of literary translation. And the ever-changing perception of the characteristics of literary translation in the light of these answers has been, in turn, reflecting upon my work as a translator, editor, trans- lation instructor and researcher. Thus, it has been a necessity to delve into different answers to these questions in order to comprehend both a contemporary perception of literary translation in Turkish cultural polysystem and to come to grips withe the nature of a multifaceted work carried out by assuming different roles in the production, teaching, and analysis of literary translation.

The first question centers around the starting point of the adventure of literary translation: What is a source text? Or, to put it differently, do we have, as translators,

a fixed, unique and inalterable "source text" on our desks at the beginning of the actual process of literary translation? Surely, we do have a source text on our desks. When asked 'What have you been recently working on?' we often tell our friends that we have beeen working on the translation of a particular work of fiction written by a particular author. However, the source text in question is never present on its own; it is only formulated during one of the beginning phases of literary translation -reading of the text to be translated- and prior to this phase, it is just an agglomeration of a number of words written on a piece of paper. Once we begin to read the source text, we formulate it in our minds by performing various interpretive activities: We attempt to enter its fictional world by trying to decode, receive, interpret, and criticize the mysteries of this particular world. As it is emphasized by critical theories especially since the second half of the XXth century, literary texts are rewrittten by the readers during a close reading process. The same text may certainly be interpreted in different ways by readers in the light of their individual, social and cultural viewpoints. Roland Barthes suggests in his famous article entitled "The Death of the Autor" that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (1988: 172). In reality, what makes a text alive is the work of its readers who rewrite it in accordance with their expectations and responses.

Contemporary translation theories also emphasize the fact that source text is not only reproduced in the process of the actual translation into another language, but is also rewritten in the translator's mind during the process of reading. For instance; translation theorist Hans J. Vermeer suggests that the readers of the translated text have access only to the translator's interpretation of the source text by drawing on modern critical theories:

"Modern theories, such as reception aesthetics, claim that it is the recipient who "constitutes" his text; he is the real author or at least co-author of his text, which he constitutes (or creates) out of a texteme, as the result of an(other) author's text production. The translator is first of all a recipient, and only then the translator (producer/designer) of his own target text. The target texteme recipients must learn that no translation can give them the author's text, but the translator's interpretation of the author's text(eme) plus the translator's translated wording of his interpretation of the texteme." (1998: 60)

Viewing the translated text is as the translator's rewriting of his/her own interpretation of the source text annuls the presence of a fixed source text. Thus, it is always possible to speak of a number of versions of a single source text as formulated by the translators who undertook the task of rewriting it in a different language. The case of retranslations can be seen as the ultimate proof of the infinite ways of interpreting the same work of fiction. The French translation theorist Antoine Berman underlines the

necessity of retranslations as a consequence of the possible new interpretations of the source texts together with the lingual, cultural and social changes the receiving system undergoes in time (1990: 1).

This particular view of source text inevitably changes the dynamics of literary translation courses whose planning and conducting is quite similar to that of translation workshops' held at various universities. When the prospective translators are asked to reflect on their individual receptions of the source text, they discover how they entered the fictional world of the source text and how this same world might be interpreted in different ways by their classmates. Needless to say, the different interperetations of the same work of fiction are not devoid of a solid base developed throughout an attentive and meticulous critical reading process. As all literature is read, received, interpereted and rewritten in the light of critical viewpoints, prospective literary translators should at least be familiar with critical theories which have formulated significant approaches to the reading and analysis of literary texts. Critical theories focusing on textual analysis and reader response such as New Criticism and reception aesthetics might guide literary translators during the process of the reading of the source text by means of their methodological and consistent approaches. For instance; a prospective literary translator who is familiar with New Criticism is very well aware of the importance of interpreting a literary work by using the data and clues obtained from the work itself without referring to the outside world; thus s/he recognizes how the fallacies stemming from commentaries based on non-literary elements might be thoroughly misleading in the interpretation of the source text. And while trying to answer how s/he responded to a particular "ambiguity" in the source text, s/he prefers to rely on his/her interpretation of the textual elements. This act of self-explanation as a reader of a literary text might be seen as a preparatory phase to the description and justification of the decisions s/he will be taking concerning the two different languages and cultures during the actual process of translation as a literary translator.

The second question focuses on the process of "the actual translation", which is called "translation proper" and defined as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language" by Roman Jakobson in his well-known essay entitled "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (2000: 114). How do we translate? Translators and translation scholars alike have been trying to provide definitive answers to this question for eons in order to shed light on the nature of the act of translation which dates back to the construction of the Tower of Babel. The number of theoretical articles and books written to provide various answers to this question is infinite for the simple reason that it is not possible to speak of a single method of translating which could be applied to all types of translation including literary translation. Not only are all source texts unique but also the differences between the target audiences they are aimed at addressing are

tremendous. Consequently, translation instructors rather than sticking to one specific method of translating in translation courses and workshops prefer to emphasize some common strategies and dominant norms which themselves take into consideration in their practical translating work. The world of literary translation of a particular society at a specific time is thus reflected into translation courses via instructors who formulate their personal method of teaching not only by referring to their theoeretical readings but also to their individual translational experience.

To begin to reflect upon the ways of translating a particular source text into a target language, the process of the reformulation of the source text in our minds has to be completed. At the end of this process as a reader, ciritic and translator we have already created our version of the source text which is now to be rewritten in another language for a new set of readers. The actual rewriting process requires us to enter the publishing world of the present day with a view to considering the types of behaviour we are expected to adopt. According to the translation scholar Theo Hermans, the publishing world is a "social institution" in which norms play a central role to such an extent that "learning to *translate* means learning to operate the norms of translation, i.e. to operate with them and within them, anticipating, acommodating, calculating, negotiating the expectations of others concerning the social instution called translation" (1995:9).

As it is the case throughout the world as well as in our country, translators are generally expected to produce target texts which reflect the "foreignness" of the source culture to a given degree. Adaptations or translations which abound with references, codes and lingual colloquialisms peculiar to target culture are not especially appreciated; on the contrary, they are labelled as being "too much domesticated". The reason for this is the fact that the conscious readers of foreign fiction throughout the world desire to be introduced into the cultures of the literary works as a result of their reading activities. In fact, the formulation of such a desire by the readers is closely linked with the approaches of post-structuralist and post-colonialist thinkers to the act of translation. For instance, translation scholar Rosemary Arrojo who shares these views draws attention to the asymetrical relations of power in the world of translation which requires the formulation of a new "ethics of translation" in order to give a voice to all cultures without privileging any in the global cultural world (1997: 5-24). In order to prevent any kind of favoritism among cultures, the eminent post-colonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who translated Jacques Derrida's *De la Grammatologie* into English warns the translators against the danger of the assimilation of cultural elements of the source text (2000: 397-416). According to Spivak in such cases "the task of the translator is to surrender herself to the linguistic rhetoricity of the original text" (ibid: 405). Antoine Berman also emphasizes the role of translation as providing a new "home" for a foreign text in a different culture by establishing relationships with the

Other (1984: 16). In Berman's view the essence of translation for the target culture is opening, dialogue, crossing, and decentralization. Thus, to preserve the "otherness" of the source culture is of primary importance if languages, literatures and cultures are to be enriched via translation.

When the views of the above-mentioned theorists are taken into consideration, the task of the literary translator becomes two-fold: On the one hand s/he has to preserve the "foreignness" of the source culture, on the other hand s/he has to do his/her best in order to provide an enjoyable reading process for the target readers. In other words, the translator while introducing the source culture to the target readers also has to try to preserve their pleasure of reading by allowing them to enter the fictional world of the target text easily and comfortably. When the task of the translator is defined in this way, translation might seem to be almost an impossible task to perform. However, literary translation, though destined to be a failure by too many scholars, includes a great number of outstandingly successful examples in all national literatures whose developments are inevitably indebted to the relations translators established with foreign literatures through the intermediary of translation. Thus, literary translation has always been an enriching factor in the development of literatures owing to the meticulous work of translators.

Another point which is often underscored in literary translation courses and workshops is the necessity to lay the basis of a reading adventure for the target readers which will be similar to the one experienced by the readers of the source text. In her book entitled *Why Translation Matters*, Edith Grossman, the well-known American translator of Latin American fiction including the works of Cervantes, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Mario Vargas Llosa among other prominent writers, draws attention to the necessity of creating a similar reading experience in the readers of the source and target cultures:

"... is that we write -or perhaps rewrite in language B a work of literature originally composed in language A, hoping the readers of the second language -I mean, of course, readers of the translation- will perceive the text, emotionally and artistically, in a manner that parallels and corresponds to the esthetic experience of its first readers." (2010: 7)

This view of parallelism beetween the processes of reading of the source and target text, in fact, is not a currently formulated perspective in translation studies. The concept of "equivalence" which has been a central point of focus for centuries in translation studies (though from very different points of view e.g. linguistic, cultural, post-structuralist) draws on the idea of the creation of a similar response on the target audience to the one experienced by the source audience. Translation theorist Eugene A. Nida whose work derives from his experience in Bible translation identifies two types of equivalence -formal and dynamic- in his book entitled *Toward a Science of Translating*

first published in 1964. According to Nida "a translation which attempts to produce a dynamic rather than a formal equivalence is based upon "the principle of equivalent effect"" (2000: 129). The Italian semiotician, philosopher, literary critic, and novelist Umberto Eco also underlines the importance of an "equivalent effect" in *Experiences in Translation* as follows: "Instead of speaking of equivalence of meaning, we can speak of *functional equivalence*: a good translation must generate the same effect aimed at by the original." (2001: p. 45) Approximately forty years later, Nida's "dynamic equivalence" becomes "functional equivalence" in Eco's writings on translation. Eco focuses on this particular type of equivalence in order both to prove the possibility of translation and to underscore the importance of the "effect" created on target readers:

"If no word in a language is exactly the same as any other word in a different language, and languages are reciprocally incommensurable, either translating is impossible or it consists in freely interpreting the source text and recreating it. At this point what interests scholars is no longer the relationship between source and target but rather the effect of the translated text on the target culture." (ibid, p. 21)

In his book dated 2006 *Dire presque la même chose* Eco defines translation as "saying almost the same thing". Literary translators might try then "to say almost the same thing" by creating a parallelism between the reading processes experienced by the readers of the source and target texts. To do so they "must take into account rules that are not strictly linguistic but, broadly speaking, cultural" in Eco's view (2001, p. 17). For instance; a liteary translator who aims at "functional equivalence" should translate a bad joke of a character in a novel so as to make the target readers also think that the particular character makes a bad joke by establishing an appropriate cultural atmosphere in the translated novel with the help of the selected wordings from the target language.

Following the rewriting of the translator's interperetation of the source text the third question comes to the foreground: What is a translation? When we refer to translation studies in order to provide an answer to this question, we recognize that almost each theorist felt the need to define translation at a particular point of their comprehensive studies on different aspects and elements of the act of translation. For instance; Gideon Toury who formulated one of the most established translation theories -descriptive translation studies- defines translation as "any target-language utterance which is presented or regarded as such within the target culture, on whatever grounds" (1985: 20). As Theo Hermans suggests the definition of translation of any theorist bears significant implications with regard to the basic tenets of the theory in question: "... definitions are inevitably written from a certain point of view, reflecting particular theoretical assumptions." (2013: 75) Understandably, Toury aims to analyze all translational phenomena in order to grasp all existing appearances of translation in a

particular culture within the scope of his exhaustive descriptive theory. Thus he refrains from leaving aside any translation which does not fit into a pre-given definition of translation. Antoine Berman also underlines the fact that all attempts to define translation reflect the way in which the theorist or the translator who offers the definition perceives translation. Here it is important to note that different interpretations of the act of translation are shaped by the social, cultural and historical conditions of their own time (1995: 60). All definitions of translation are, therefore, relative assumptions reflecting the dominant "idea" of translation in a particular time and place of a given culture. Berman goes on arguing that just like poetry or theatre translation too does not have an "absolute" definition (ibid: 61). However, we do have an understanding of translation that is no poorer than our ideas on poetry and drama which strike us with their endless variations. Berman claims that the studies on the history of translation in different cultures reveal the infinite richness of the "idea" of translation which is neither imaginary, nor abstract. This vast understanding of translation in different cultures and historical periods leads Berman to consider translation as a human experience. And in order to create an independent field of study for translation, this particular experience should reflect upon itself. Thus, translation studies should be based on "translating experience which reflects upon itself" in Bermans's view (1989: 674). The French philosopher Paul Ricœur who also analyzed translating experience from a hermeneutic point of view by often referring to Berman's views -especially to the title of his work: 'the experience of the foreign'- argues that translation is a mysterious activitiy which is possible in practice, but impossible in theory (2004: 27). Jean-René Ladmiral, one of the eminent representatives of French translation theory, offers another definition of translation in his book entitled *Traduire: théorèmes pour la traduction* (1994). He argues that the concept of translation itself is dubious because of the difficulties involved in the act of its definition (ibid : XVIII). Following a brief critique of Toury's definition of translation, he argues that an activity which we have all done at some part of our lives -especially at high-schools and universities- poses an insurmountable problem when we try to define it. Ladmiral, a well-known translator of Habermas, Kant and Adorno into French, prefers to define translation in the form of a question and answer: "What is the use of translation?" "It exempts us from reading the original." (ibid: XIX) With this definition Ladmiral reminds us of the basic contribution of literary translation to our lives: We have access to literary texts whose languages we cannot speak with the help of their translations. Literary texts created in different parts of the world meet a group of new readers once they are translated into a foreign language. Thus begins the "after-life" of these texts as Walter Benjamin terms it during which they find the opportunity to increase the number of their readers which would be limited to only the native ones if they had not been translated into a different language (2000: 16).

To recapitulate, the translator begins with the interpretation of the source text and ends with the rewriting of this interpretation in the target language. One of the happiest moments of the trajectory of literary translation from a translator's perspective is the meeting of the translated text with its new readers. Having rewritten a text that s/he most probably admires in the target language, the literary translator now enjoys the pleasure of helping this text to acquire new readers who would interpret it in different ways. In fact, this is one of the vital points in the cycle of reading and interpreting of literary texts: The literary translator who assumes the role of a reader, critic and rewriter of the source text during the process of translation offers the translated text to new readers who will in turn respond to it by deciphering its fictional world and discovering new possibilities for its interpretation, thus providing a new life to the source text in a foreign culture.

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