



OPTING WITHIN TRANSLATION STRATEGIES IN LITERARY TEXT TRANSLATION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract:

This article epitomises different approaches to translation and explores the results of the application of the most commonly used translational strategies in literary text translation in an academic context, among the third-year students of the undergraduate studies of English and Chinese and English at the University of East Sarajevo. After the relevant theoretical background, the empirical part of the article offers the presentation and discussion of the most commonly used translational strategies in reference to particular structural elements in a literary text, proper nouns restructuring and culture-specific items adaptation. The premise was that the restructuring of specific translation units was carried out with the application of *literal translation*, *original form retention* and *paraphrasing*, along with the possible deviations from the text faithfulness. The text-based approach and convenience sampling method showed that the most complex part was to restructure the omitted introductory elements in subordinate clauses, time/tense variations in back-shifted clauses in indirect speech and the choice of the most proper strategy in the restructuring of proper nouns (particularly toponyms). Further focus was on the examination of intercultural mismatch and translational restructuring of the source language-specific cultural items. As for the restructuring of proper nouns, the respondents mostly opted for foreignisation, considering the option to be the safest ground.

Keywords: literary translation, translation strategies, restructuring, foreignisation, domestication

1. Introduction

The research in this article is envisioned as a contribution to the investigation of the efficacy and incorporation of translational strategies in literary text translation within an academic environment. The idea was to identify the most frequently used translational strategies within the given literal context and their effect on the naturalness of the target language translated expression.

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Translation implies the incorporation of all the knowledge acquired through a foreign language and native language learning and its application in mediation between the *source language* and the *target language*. It represents a multidimensional process, including the mandatory reference to linguistic, philological, psycholinguistic and sociological contexts. Within such a concept, translation is seen as one mode of inter/cross-cultural communication and the language is a cultural mediator. In that sense, *cultural mediation* is defined as “the extent to which translators intervene in the transfer process, feeding their own knowledge and beliefs into processing the text” (Hatim & Munday, 1997: 147).

2. Theoretical background

Translation implies aiming at achieving the highest degree of both structural and semantic equivalence between a source language and a target language (cf. Catford, 1965; Nida 1969, Ivir, 1978, Ordurari 2007). The equivalence is achieved in the complex process of *restructuring* (cf. Ivir 1978), within the communicative model of translation, which implies the proper comprehension of the translation unit in a source language and its linguistic transference in a target language, using those corresponding structures that most naturally render the semantic structure of the unit in a target language. With respect to the aforementioned, Venuti (2000) mentions *domestication* and *foreignisation*, as the two sides of the translational policy. Whereas domestication represents the adaptation of a foreign text to the nature of a target language text, foreignisation is a retention of the original form whenever possible, so as to preserve as much of the source language’s nature as possible (*Ibid*, 2000).

With the expansion of pragmatics and communicational linguistic studies, the translation is given the spatial, situational dimension and comes to be seen as a means of communication, either within one culture or inter-culturally. Thus, the authors such as Ivir (1978) or Newmark (1988) see the process as discourse-oriented and investigate numerous situational factors that need to be considered in every translation activity, so as to achieve a successful rendering of the message in the target language as possible.

In cultural studies (cf. Gaedler, 2000; Harvey, 2003), language is seen as a part of cultural heritage, which in its totality incorporates territory, language, folklore and people. Therefore, language itself is seen as a means of cultural mediation, the process which can be realised not only linguistically, but extra linguistically as well. However, the reference to culture-specific items in translation is not the primary part of the research in this article, even though no language can be understood out of the concept of the corresponding cultures of the languages that come into contact.

There is another differentiation worth mentioning here, and that is between notions of *translational competence* and *linguistic competence*. The first relates to the latter in terms of hyponymy, in the process of translation, it not only implies the transference of specific linguistic material (the code from the source language to the target language) but the awareness that the cognitive process of translation implicates coding of the information in source language, modification of the information in the process of transference and decoding and formulation of the message in the target language (Ivir, 1978; Bnini, 2016). The three stages of the translational process correspond to what Nida (1969) and Ordurari (2007) call *text*

analysis, cognitive transfer and *restructuring* of a translational item in the target language. Translational competence also implies the ability to operate within a specific genre, the proper estimation of the situation and pragmatic competence, omission of what is not necessary to be rendered in the target language and restructuring of what is missing in the surface structure in the source language and is absolutely necessary for target language structure and so on. All these elements need to be considered in the process of restructuring.

3. Scope of research and methodology

The research was conducted within the text-based literary translation (Bnini, 2016: 55), as a complex process implying not only the restructuring of a source language elements into a target language but including the third party, the utilizers of translation (listeners and/or readers) and the creation of literary and artistic effect. The sampling was carried out in the context of two courses: *Contemporary English Language (C1)* and the collection of stories *The Pulse*, along with the course *Theory of Translation (3rd year of English)*. The sampling of the relevant contextual elements was carried out with 92 academic tasks (academic 2020/21 year, third-year undergraduates at English Department and Chinese and English Department, University of East Sarajevo).

Table 1: Number of relevant translational items in the corpus

Translational item	Number of examples	Percentage (%)
Syntactic structure	175	63
Proper nouns	69	25
Culture-specific items	34	12
Total	278	100

We utilised the convenience sampling method, structural and semantic modelling, textual analysis and synthesis. The methodology was incorporated with the integrated approach to translation. The ground hypothesis was related to the premise that the most commonly used strategies with the language structures that were seen as the trickiest and singled out for analysis were *paraphrasing, literal translation, original form retention* and *transcription*, along with the dominant *foreignisation* and the overall non-deviation from the *faithfulness* of the text. We further premised that *literal translation* (implying rendering of both structural and semantic equivalence) was used whenever possible in the specific contextual situations, and an *original form retention* (much more than *transcription*) was particularly utilised within the context of proper nouns. The paraphrasing was also utilised to convey the meaning of the source language culture-specific items as much as possible in the target language.

4. Data presentation and analysis

This section is organised in three parts, depending on the type of restructuring and the application of the most relevant translational strategies in particular. The first part refers to specific and trickiest situations in the restructuring of syntactic elements from the source language structure, the second one to the manipulation with translational strategies in the

process of the adaptation of proper nouns and the last one to the restructuring of culture-specific elements.

4.1. Restructuring of syntactic elements from the source language

In order to properly restructure English complex sentences, it is first and foremost important to be able to comprehend their internal structure, to identify the matrix clause or clauses (if the structure given is of a compound-complex type) and all the other information being conveyed by the subordinate elements or adjuncts. We identified two contextual situations where the students had typically met the most difficulties in the restructuring of such sentences, and those are:

- 1) the non-recognition of the elided elements in the surface structure of the target language subordinate form, and
- 2) the non-recognition or unawareness of the grammatical rule of back-formation in some form of indirect speech. Some of the most typical examples from the corpus are as follows:
 - a) Mike Nichols had taken an option on Alice's Triple Sec, but eventually pulled out; some journeyman from telly had come in and made it crassly sexual. Not that Alice put it like this; she would say, with a faint smile, that the adaptation had 'skimped on the book's withholdingness', *a phrase some found baffling*ⁱⁱ. (SJⁱⁱⁱ, p. 34)
 - b) She had always been a town person, and her interest in the countryside was largely pragmatic, *a flock of sheep only signifying roast lamb*. (SJ, p. 36)
 - c) But Ken was aware of this trait of his, a tendency to settle for the approximate, which one irate girlfriend called 'just being incredibly lazy' – *a description he had always cherished*. (GW, p. 67)
 - d) He thought of himself as an instinctive amateur, her as a technocrat. (ML, p. 68)

The surface structure of the sentence in example a) allows for the subordinating conjunction and the predicate of the clause to be omitted, however, in the translational restructuring it is necessary to introduce the elements in the Serbian sentence, so as both grammatically and informationally link the relative clause in subordination to the rest of the sentence. In example b), the confusion of the non-recognition of the elided elements might as well be caused by the comma, instead of the dash. In the restructuring, it is necessary to introduce the elided elements, for the Serbian sentence to be grammatical. Another option here is to introduce a semicolon instead of the comma; it would thus be possible to have the expression with the ellipsis. The relative sentences in example c) also seek the introduction of the elided elements in reconstruction, in order for the Serbian sentence to be grammatically acceptable. In example d), the recommendable strategy is to restructure the form of translated sentence in terms of restructuring the conjunction introducing the second clause.

Another translational difficulty was identified with the non-recognition of non-referential use of tenses in back formation in the forms of indirect speech. Since the rule of back-formation is irrelevant for Serbian sentences, this interlingual error seems to be rather

ⁱⁱ The parts of the excerpts relevant for the discussion are italicised.

ⁱⁱⁱ The relevant examples are labeled by the abbreviations referring to the story from which they are excerpted. The full references on the sources are given in the *Sources*.

fossilised among the ESL students. Some of the typical examples from the corpus are the following:

- a) And beyond this, he *realised* that, when he *rose* in the stable and *brushed* the horsehair from his clothes, then *crossed* to the house and *took up* a brush made from the hair of another animal, he *became* more than he was taken for. (LM, p. 138)
- b) He *hoped* she *wouldn't ask* him to explain the difference between Anglicans and Catholics – or the history behind it. (EW, p. 10)
- c) He *replied* that he *hoped* he *wasn't meant to take* that literally. (GW, p. 68)
- d) He *knew* she *worked* in the bank, she *knew* he *taught* at school. (TP, p. 95)
- e) 'Thank you,' Lynn said, but he *could tell* she *was* a bit edgy about it. (TP, p. 97)
- f) Calum *explained* how you *looked* for a small declivity in the sand, *poured* a little salt into it, and then *waited* for the razor clam to shoot up a few inches from its lair. (ML, p. 125)
- g) He *knew* that he *would need* the island to stay as still and unchanging as possible. (ML, p. 126)

The main issue here was the non-recognition of the non-referential use of *Simple Past* after the reporting verb, which altogether resulted in the deviation from the informational faithfulness of the text. All the verbs after the reporting verb refer to the present temporal sector.

Table 2: The students' achievement to opt for the proper translational strategy

Syntactic elements	Recognition of the elided element and proper restructuring	Non-recognition of the elided element and original form retention	Proper time / tense interpretation in indirect speech
175	83	42	50

4.2. Adaptation of proper nouns

When it comes to the adaptation of proper nouns from the source language to the target language, two strategies were available:

- a) *transcription*, and
- b) retention of the *original form*.

Some of the proper nouns from the context that was relevant for the translational adaptation were divided into two groups (all taken from *The Pulse*):

- a) Personal proper nouns - Melanie, Gray, Vernon, Mrs Ridgewell, Phil, Joanna, McCain, Doreena, John Updike, Alice, Jane, Mike Nichols, Graham Greene, Oliver Wendel Holmes, Calum, Zebediah Harries, Mr Tuttle, Braille; and
- b) Toponyms: Colchester, Edinburgh, Charleston, King Lynn, Dartington, Dublin, Adelaide, Cheltenham, Curbar Edge, Grindelford, Marlobo Lights, Traigh Eias, Greian Head, Vatersay.

The prevalent strategy applied among the students was the retention of the original form, particularly with the toponyms. The students avoided transcription, except sporadically. Only 3 of them opted for transcription in examples in 1), with the names Melanie, Alice and Jane (respectively, Мелани, Алис and Џејн). With the other proper nouns in the corpus, they relied on the original form retention.

4.3. Restructuring of culture-specific items

Most difficulties and ambiguities arise when a non-native speaker meets culture-specific items in the text that is intended for translation. Such contextual situations appear difficult to cope with even for a professional translator, let alone the students. However, there were three strategies that they used for the adaptation of culture-specific elements in restructuring: a) offering a structure of equivalent meaning in TL, b) paraphrasing, and c) original form retention, possibly with an annotated explanation. Some of the culture-specific items from the corpus are the following:

- a) None of the polite *'Her Majesty Government' stuff* (PJ, p. 25),
- b) *St. Valentine's Day* (PJ, p. 59),
- c) ... Jane thought it would be improved by more references to Alice's own life and fewer to *Epictetus*. (SJ, p. 40)
- d) *Friday 13th* (PJ, p. 51),
- e) *Japanesy garden* (GW, p. 63),
- f) 'Is that where you are taking us, David, with this *Socratic preface*'? (JL, p. 80)
- g) Lynn lit a *Silk Cut*, as she did at the end of every walk. (TP, p. 99).
- h) *Prince of Whale's check* (CO, p. 154),
- i) *Chinese medicine* (PL, p. 208).

The original form retention might be suggested in examples *b*, *d* and *i*, with the possible additional explanation of the celebration of St. Tryphon, who is celebrated in the eastern culture on the same day as St. Valentine in the western culture. In example *i*, the term Chinese might be restructured with the term *eastern*, so as to make it referential more broadly and because the holistic approach in medicine would be understood as such under the common noun here. The paraphrasing might be applicable in examples *a*, *c*, *f*, *h*, whereas, in examples *e*, the comprehensibility of the restructured item would be further achieved by the introduction of an annotation, which would refer to the way the space and the overall lifestyle is organised in Japan. In example *g*, apart from the name (that can be either transcribed or left in its original form), the restructuring might offer *cigarette*, by the name, so as to make the overall expression as understandable and natural as possible.

Table 3: Presentation of the strategies used in adaptation of culture specific items

Culture-specific items	Retention of the original form	TL equivalent structure	Paraphrasing
34	21	4	9

5. Discussion and conclusions

This article aimed to identification of the most difficult translational items in literary text translation and the most common strategies used in the restructuring of such items among the third-year undergraduates at the English Department at the University of East Sarajevo, during academic 2018/2019. Several contextual situations were of particular interest in the article, with which the students had met most difficulties in translational restructuring. Those situations were the non-recognition of the elided elements in subordination, the tense/time

mismatch in indirect speech, adaptation of the proper nouns and adaptation of culture-specific items.

The initial premise has partly proved valid since the most common strategies used with the contextual situations that are seen the trickiest in the context of literary text translation and the corpus were: literal translation, paraphrasing, original form retention and transcription. Still commonly used strategy among the students when it comes to the restructuring of elided elements in subordination is a literal translation, without the necessary restructuring of the omitted elements in the target language. Another syntactic difficulty arose with the non-recognition of the proper temporal reference after the reporting verb. Out of the total number of such examples in the corpus, there were only 50 correct interpretations of the relevant temporal sector after the reporting verb. This indicates the necessity of a more detailed methodological approach to this delicate grammatical item. The rule of back-formation being irrelevant in the Serbian sentence, this grammatical item needs to be given a particular space and reference in the curricula and teaching process. The method of text-based analysis is convenient for pointing out various contextual situations where such type of translational mismatch might occur and the necessity for a mindful perception of such situations in language learning.

As obvious in Table 3, with the adaptation of the culture-specific items, the students were mostly opting for the retention of the original form, considering the strategy the safest ground. However, this cannot always be the most recommendable option, since many of the cultural concepts and items are non-existent in the target language and the retention of the original form might produce an incomprehensible TL language form. However, when both foreignisation (original form retention) and domestication (paraphrasing of TL equivalent) are possible with a culture-specific item, it can be left to the intuitive choice of the translator to opt for the most appropriate strategy, considering the type of genre and minding the language economy principle.

All the aforementioned conclusions would need to be reconsidered in more numerous exemplifications from a wider corpus. The students would also need to be encouraged to domesticate in terms of transcription, so as to naturalise the translated text as much as possible. Another significant emphasis in the classroom should be put on the importance of social and soft skills development that inevitably occurs through interaction with other cultures, which facilitates the comprehension and proper interpretation and restructuring of many translational items from the source language text.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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