

Translation Analysis and Assessment of Poetic Translation: Whitman's Poetry Translated into Albanian

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Abstract: Among translation issues, poetry translation is the most problematic area challenging both translators and authorities in the field of translation studies. Translation of poetry as a yet unanalyzed 'black box' has been a much debated issue since olden times, with many pros and cons and dichotomist reasoning as to its possibility or impossibility. This is due to the high cultural prestige of poetry which requires time, effort and ingenuity to translate rhythm structures and the figurative language involved. An examination of an actual instance of Whitman's poetry translated into Albanian demonstrates that the translation process is guided by case-specific values. These values, as well as the strategies employed to realize them, are set and agreed by the interested parties during the translation process. In the present study, Whitman's *LEAVES OF GRASS* and its Albanian translation by S. Luarasi will be focused upon and descriptively analyzed at both linguistic and extra linguistic levels. The aim is to identify the formative elements of versified discourse in the source and target texts and to arrive at a tentative model of translation analysis which can serve as a measure for translation assessment of poetic genre.

Keywords: translatability, textual analysis, extra-textual analysis, translation assessment, poetic discourse

1. Introduction

1.1. Definition and Process of Translation

Many a different definition has been proposed for the simple concept termed 'translation'. Let's get started with Nida (1964) who defines translation as a process of finding the closest natural equivalent of source language in target language in terms of message and style, and proceed to Catford (1965) who believes that translation is the replacement of the source language textual elements by the target language textual elements. Toury (1978), cited in Lefevere (1992), holds the view that translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions whereby an original text is rewritten by the translator into a different language. Newmark (1988) considers translation as a craft in which the translator tries to replace a written message in one language by the same message in another language. Munday (2002), as a more recent authority, is of the opinion that in translation process the translator changes an original written text in original verbal language into a written text in a different verbal language. Among all these, just to mention a few, Toury's definition is a culturally-oriented one focusing on the socio-cultural patterns of source and target languages. Concerning the translation process, a very general view is that in translation there are two processes involved: the translator analyzes the SL form in order to find out the meaning and second the translator produces, or chooses proper TL form for this meaning. It should be added that since each language has a distinctive form and pattern of its own and there is thus no one- to one relationship between any two languages, the same meaning may be expressed in another language in quite a different grammatical or lexical form.

1.2 Types of Translation

Based on their definition for translation, the above-mentioned authorities propose their specific categorization of translation types. Catford (1965) introduces three types of translation in terms of three criteria:

1. The extent of translation (full translation vs. partial translation)
2. The grammatical rank at which the translation equivalence is established (rank-bound translation vs. unbound translation)
3. The levels of language involved in translation (total translation vs. restricted translation)

Nida (1964) categorizes translation into two types: formal translation vs. dynamic translation. In formal translation, he asserts, the way meaning was conveyed is shown, that is, the style of the original is preserved. Dynamic translation, he believes, is a translation principle according to which translators seek to translate the meaning of the original in such a

way that the TL wording will trigger the same impact on the target audience as the original wording did upon the source language audience. He further states that in this type of translation usually the form of the original text is changed.

Newmark (1988) proposes two types of translation: semantic vs. communicative. He states that while communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original, semantic translation attempts to render as closely as the semantic and stylistic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original. As to communicative translation, he believes that equivalent effect is illusory because if the text is out of TL space and time the equivalent effect can not be produced. A cursory glance at the above descriptions of translation types brings us to Munday's (2002) statement that Newmark's communicative and semantic translations are similar to Nida's dynamic and formal equivalence.

1.3 Translation of Poetry

Poetry, according to Alexander Pope, has been said to consist of "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" (1711). Thus, poetry seems to lie on a continuum with one end attached to human feelings and emotions, which can only be sensed, not given expression to; for how can we say how much we enjoyed a poem?

The other side attached to his means of communication, i.e. language; hence the controversial relationship between language and mind. The issue of the translatability of poetry has long been a heated debate among scholars. Some scholars believe that what is lost in translation is the poetry, while others state that all meanings are translatable and only the form of poetic discourse is lost in translation. There are still other scholars who believe that poetry translation is possible only if both the meaning and style of the source text are kept intact in the target language. Below is a sketch of the arguments of both groups:

According to Frost (1969), the main characteristic of poetic discourse that distinguishes it from common discourse is that in poetry form and content cannot be separated. Content is highly language-bound and this is what makes poetic translation of poetry more difficult than other types of translations. He believes poetry is what is lost in translation. Nabakof cited in Giblett (1987) compares poetry translation to beheading, insulting the dead and a parrot's scream, and Roman Jakobson (1960) states that poetry is by definition untranslatable.

As to those who take an almost positive stance concerning the translation of poetry, Boase-Beir and De Beaugrand cited in Connally (1991) believe that translation of poetry can be successful only if both style and content are transferred. Holmes (1970) who has a descriptive view towards translation believes that there may be as many different translations of the same poem as the number of translators. He adds that while the translation of a poem is never equal to the original, any text including a poetic one has many interpretations and therefore many possible translations. Nair (1991) believes that poetry is an imaginative expression of a poet's feelings and experiences and its translation must be a faithful transference of the poet's ideas. A poetry translator should, therefore, strive for accuracy and this makes the translator's fluency of expression indispensably difficult. Lefevere (1992) who takes side with the issue introduces a number of methods for translation of poetry; namely, phonological translation, literal translation, rhythmic translation, translation into prose, translation into rhymed poetry, translation into poetry without rhyme (blank verse), and interpretive translation. He states that in the past most translators translated poetry into rhymed poetry but today they translate poetry into prose. He adds that some translators translate only the meaning at the price of the form but sometimes translators get help from the poet to create a new work. A final word here is that the possibility of poetry translation does not mean that all aspects of a poem are translatable in practice, since each language has its own lexical and structural patterns which in some cases resist imitation in other languages. However, getting close to the original text as much as possible is not a far-fetched aspiration, as the past has witnessed great achievements in cross cultural renderings of poetic masterpieces of a language to other languages.

2. Method

Based on the aim of the present study, a translated version into Albanian of Whitman's poetry will be compared and contrasted with its original at both textual and extra-textual levels. Dealing with the *object* (product/translated text) rather than the *subject* (processes employed by the translator) of translation, this procedure first incorporates the *look* or form of the text at the textual level under three major headings; namely, music, rhythm and tropes. In this section, the two texts are examined in terms of words, images, and structural patterns, literary devices, and type of the poem. Moreover, the linguistic differences and similarities between the ST and TT are elaborated. Also, the *aura* or tone of the text is examined and exemplified with respect to the kind of poem. Finally, the message of the text is focused.

At the extra-textual level, the ST and TT are discussed and scrutinized in their cultural framework. Here, culture-specific terms are explained and the covert corners of individual words and phrases in the ST will be demystified with an eye on the existence or nonexistence of their equivalents in the TT. Eventually, based on the detailed discussion of the translated text, a product-oriented model for translation analysis will be proposed.

3. Analysis and Discussion of Data

3.1. Textual Analysis

Form (linguistic features) has been defined as the actual words, phrases, clauses, paragraphs, etc., which are spoken or written. In other words, it is the structural part of language which is seen or heard. In literary criticism, form often refers to a literary type (lyric, ode, short story, etc.) or to patterns of rhythm, rhyme, lines and stanzas. In this study, the material to be analyzed is a piece of free verse poetry which is devoid of any meter or rhyme.

3.1.1. Music and Tropes ("I Hear America Singing")

Literary terms used in this poem include alliteration, synecdoche, metaphor, repetition, and imagery.

1. **Rhyme Scheme** - There is no rhyme scheme. Whitman is the father of free verse.
2. **Rhythm and Meter**- There is no metrical pattern. Whitman uses repetition, however, to create rhythm.
3. **Synecdoche** - Of all the "I Hear America Singing" literary terms, none makes its mark more strongly than synecdoche. "America" in line 1 represents individual Americans, more specifically, workers. Each line of the poem is an example of synecdoche (a special type of metaphor where the parts equal the whole or the whole equals the parts). Whitman is celebrating the greatness of America by celebration the greatness of its individuals.
4. **Word Choice** - "Carols" in line 1 is a connotatively charged word. It is most often associated with holy songs about Christmas. What better way to celebrate individuals and the physical body than connecting it with the physical manifestation of God himself.
5. **Metaphor** - the sounds and actions of laborers working is compared to music. Note that all the jobs described by Whitman require physical effort.
6. **Repetition** - The repetition of "the" in the final seven lines help create rhythm much in the same way the repetition of worker actions establishes a work rhythm.
7. The democratic nature of Whitman's poetry is reflected by his subject matter. He celebrates mechanics, carpenters, masons, mothers--the type of people usually not discussed in poems. For Whitman, it is the individual who matters and the individual freedom that allows him to be grea--"Each singing what belongs to her"--that matters.
8. **Theme**: Whitman's poem celebrates the individuals who make America great and the right to individual liberty that makes it possible.

3.1.2. Rhythm

Whitman wrote in a form similar to "thought-rhythm". His rhythms and cadences are also heavily influenced by the opera music. These influences are combined with nature's influence in the form of the rise and fall of the sea that he loved so much. The musical nature of Whitman's poetry is evident in the fact that no poetry has been set to music more often than his. Whitman's free verse and rhythmic innovations stand in marked contrast to the rigid rhyming and structural patterns formerly considered so essential to poetic expression.

Many of Whitman's poems rely on **rhythm** and repetition to create a captivating, spellbinding quality of incantation. Often, Whitman begins several lines in a row with the same word or phrase, a literary device called **anaphora**. For example, the first four lines of "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" (1865) each begin with the word *when*. The long lines of such poems as "Song of Myself" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" force readers to inhale several bits of text without pausing for breath, and this breathlessness contributes to the incantatory quality of the poems. Generally, the anaphora and the rhythm transform the poems into celebratory chants, and the joyous form and structure reflect the joyousness of the poetic content. Elsewhere, however, the repetition and rhythm contribute to an elegiac tone, as in "O Captain! My Captain!" This poem uses short lines and words, such as *heart* and *father*, to mournfully incant an elegy for the assassinated Abraham Lincoln.

Whitman filled his poetry with long lists. Often a sentence will be broken into many clauses, separated by commas, and each clause will describe some scene, person, or object. In "Song of Myself," for example, the speaker lists several

adjectives to describe Walt Whitman in section 24. The speaker uses multiple adjectives to demonstrate the complexity of the individual. Figuratively viewed, the images and tropes have been effectively and communicatively translated, except for some conceptual metaphors which are lost in translation.

Eg: *The farmer stops by **the bars** as he walks on a **First-day** loafe and looks at the oats and rye.*
 Translated as: *Bujku qendron te **gardhi**,
 kur vete **te dielen** te shoh tersheren dhe elbin.*

3.2. Extra-textual Analysis

In the previous section, the ST and TT were examined at textual level-one side of the coin. The other side is a comparative consideration at extra-textual level with regard to the pragmatics of the source and target texts. At this level, coherence and implicature are the elements to be discussed. Here the main focus is the knowledge presented in the ST as well as the TT reader's knowledge of the world; that is to say, the cultural aspects of the text. Translation of a text inevitably involves at least two cultures. If it is accepted that one of the purposes of literary translation is to make the reader acquainted with other nations' cultures in other parts of the world, then translation of cultural values and concepts of a literary work becomes inevitable. This is because, he adds, culture and language are essentially so much interwoven and indivisible that meaning transference is impossible without transference of cultural concepts. Therefore, the translator is to introduce such values and concepts rather than replace them with the target language ones. In fact, it is quite natural that the TT reader whose culture is definitely different from that of the ST writer may feel some gaps in the TT, or may be unable to glean at least some parts of it. This is especially peculiar to culture bound texts that have deep roots in the SL culture, allusive of historical figures, myths, events and ethics of that culture missing in the TL culture. But what should be done to fill or attenuate the nebulous feature of such gaps? Based on what James (2002) believes, in translating a text, the translator should consider for whom the original text was destined and whether his/her readership corresponds to the potential TT reader. Thus, problems of translation of a text, James adds, are not merely of a purely lexical character but also of a social, economic, political and cultural context as well as connotative aspects of a more semantic character.

The remedy to such problems lies in using either of the two seemingly contradictory methods proposed by Newmark (1988), i.e. "transference" and "componential analysis". Transference gives "local color" to the text by preserving cultural names and concepts. Still, the method may be problematic for the general readership through restricting the comprehension of particular aspects of the ST. Componential analysis is described by Newmark (1988) as the most accurate translation procedure, which excludes the culture and highlights the message. One can however prognosticate the results of both proposed methods to be somehow extreme. As for the first method, the TT reader will not understand parts of the intended meaning and cultural concepts of the ST writer. In contrast, even if the TT is comprehensible to the TT reader, through the application of the second method, part of the aesthetics of the text will be impaired. It seems desirable therefore that the translator should benefit from a synthesis of the two methods.

Regarding Witman's poem in this study, it is to a large extent culture-bound. Since the Albanian rendering is mostly a literal-semantic translation of the original, virtually most of the cultural words have been literally transferred, and no explanation has been provided for them except for isolated words. This is in part justifiable because they belong to different cultures. For example, "*I celebrate myself and sing myself*" has been rendered into Albanian as "*Lavderoj e kendoj veten time*". "Celebration" is a concept differing from one culture to another, and it is obvious that what Albanian offers is not of the same colouring and intensity as the original is. In English there is a double reinforcement of "I" and "myself". In English "I celebrate myself" is very selfish, much radical, but in Albanian we do not find such radicalism. It is more acceptable that "lavderoj" be used instead of "festoj". The sound also is better. Actually, this could be seen as a tendency to use an elevated style, a high style, which is at the same time ceremonial.

"*The Worm fence*" represents a puzzling image which does not find an equivalent image in the Albanian culture. It has been rendered as "*Leshnja nder gjerdhe*" which is a simplification of the original. This is a novel metaphor used by the poet, which should first be precisely understood and then accurately and "only" pragmatically translated for the creation of the same image and meaning in the target language.

Also, note two different translation of these lines:

*As to me directing like flame its eyes,
 With finger pointing to many immortal songs,
 And menacing voice, What singest thou? it said,*

**Duke drejtuar mua syt e tij si flake, Duke treguar me gisht
shume kenge te pavdekshme,
Dhe me ze kercononjes: "C'po kendon ti?" –tha,**

**Si nga mua drejtuar sytë porsit flakë,
Me gisht duke dëftyer shumë këngë të pavdekshme,
Dhe zë kërcënues, Ç'kendon ti? ajo tha,**

Here, the image of "like flame its eyes" is quite effectively transferred.

Based on the above discussion, the literal-semantic translation in this study lacks perfect coherence (in the sense of incorporating the TL readers' knowledge of the world and the knowledge presented in the source text) at the extra-textual level.

4. Results and Conclusion

The source and target texts were analyzed both at the textual and extra-textual levels. With reference to the analysis at the textual level, different aspects of form including tropes, rhythm and music were examined. Also tone and content of the texts were studied. As for the form, the translated piece incorporates the most prevalent structural patterns in the ST, such as present perfect, past tense verbs, relative clauses (which-clauses) etc. Finally, the rhythmical aspects of the TT render it to a more literary and beautiful piece than the original, though in some cases the constrictions of rhyme seem to be forced.

Concerning the music of the text, the translator has been able to create appropriate alliterations in the TT, although the patterns are not necessarily identical with those of the ST. Figuratively viewed,

the images and symbolic elements of the ST have been literally and, in rare cases, pragmatically translated into Albanian. As an example, the symbolic concepts of "love-root" and "silk-thread" which are quite difficult to render in Albanian are left as ambiguous "pema e jetes" and "rrjeta e mendafshite" without being direct in the original meaning of "lovmaking" and physical contact.

Although it refers to the landscape, it implies sex. When *Leaves of Grass* was introduced to the Albanian audience, poets could not express themselves about sex, this would be immoral for the time. The translation into Albanian is somehow milder and less direct in its choice of lexis and tropes. The tone of the poem is lyrical, which has been preserved in translation. All this has been literally rendered into Albanian and perception has been left to the TT reader. With respect to the analysis at the extra-textual level, the TT is mostly author-oriented, lacking perfect coherence at this level. Therefore, cultural concepts should be translated literally but supported by explanatory annotations. This way, the authenticity and aesthetic aspects of the ST will both be kept intact and the TT readers' comprehension of the translated text will be enhanced.

As for final words, on the one hand, rhythm, music, lexis, figures, aura and message contribute to the emotional impact of the translated text which, in turn, brings about its logical and emotional appeal. On the other hand, the pragmatics of the text, i.e. coherence (the knowledge presented in the text through linguistic elements versus the reader's knowledge of the world influenced by his/her age, sex, race, nationality, education, religion and political ties) and implicature (non-conventional implied meanings), give rise to the real meaning of the text. Thus, it is proposed that such tentative models be employed in the analysis and assessment of poetic translations. These models are by no means considered exhaustive; rather, they are subject to proper refinement based on fresh findings.

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