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Résumé de l'article

Cette étude fait une analyse critique des principales tendances en matière de traduction théâtrale. Elle met en relief certains problèmes qui entourent l'opération traduisante de ce genre littéraire.

Compounding Issues on the Translation of Drama/Theatre Texts

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude fait une analyse critique des principales tendances en matière de traduction théâtrale. Elle met en relief certains problèmes qui entourent l'opération traduisante de ce genre littéraire.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the main streams and players in the area of drama/theatre translation and highlights some of the issues involved in the translation of drama/theatre texts.

MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

adaptation, drama/theatre translation, literary translation theory, version

In this paper the main streams in the area of theatre translation are first of all situated within the broader main streams in literary translation theory given that drama translation is observed to generally follow these trends. Specific trends in drama translation are subsequently examined against this background.

Before the mid-1970s translation criticism mainly centred on measuring a given translation against an idealised and often subjective notion of equivalence. It was essentially normative and evaluative, proceeding from the assumption that the target text (TT) should reproduce the source text (ST), and deviations from the original were inexcusable. It was frequently reductionist and selective, centering on discussions of individual texts and confronting passages from original and translation in an effort to demonstrate the superiority of the source text and the glaring deficiencies of the target text. It was therefore preoccupied with the discovery of omissions and inaccuracies in the target text.

This situation has evolved and in the last twenty-five years there have been two conflicting developments.

On the one hand, there is the more linguistically-oriented trend where scholars have continued to consider literary translation as a process of textual transfer and working with a retrospective ST oriented approach which enquires into the TT as a translation of an original with which it must necessarily be compared. In this approach translation scholars and researchers draw on recent work in descriptive linguistics in an attempt to grasp systematically the syntactic, stylistic and pragmatic properties of the texts in question.

On the other hand, there has been the tendency to move away from comparative textual analysis and evaluative criticism towards historical description, shifting the focus from the traditional preoccupation with the revered or sacred nature of the source text towards acceptance of the target text as a product in its own right. Attempts are therefore made to set translations and their reception within the context of the

receiving culture and enquiries are made into the status of the translations in that culture. The focus is thus no longer on mere textual transfer, but on cultural mediation and interchange.

There is clear evidence that recent research in theatre translation is informed by these two trends although probably not to the same extent.

With regard to the first trend, Bogatyrev (1971:517-30) in discussing the function of the linguistic system in theatre in relation to the total experience declares that, "linguistic expression in theatre is a structure of signs constituted not only as discourse signs, but also as other signs." Bassnett (1978:161-80), in an article on some of the basic problems of translating theatre texts, highlights examples of cases where the translator has altered the ideological basis of the text through over-emphasis of the extralinguistic criteria at the expense of the linguistic and stylistic problems to be overcome. Also, in a study of the specific problems of literary translation, with particular reference to the translation of dramatic texts, she states that:

> In trying to formulate any theory of theatre translation, Bogatyrev's description of linguistic expression must be taken into account, and the linguistic element must be translated bearing in mind its function in theatre discourse as a whole (Bassnett, 1991:123)

Elsewhere she cautions the drama translator to be sensitive to linguistic elements at the prosodic level by pointing out that "the dialogue will be characterised by rhythm, intonation patterns, pitch and loudness, all elements that may not be immediately apparent from a straightforward reading of the written text in isolation" (Bassnett, 1991: 122), as opposed to when it is spoken.

Other scholars have been equally preoccupied with the linguistic characteristics of the dramatic text. Wellwarth (1981:53), for example, asserts that "the dramatic translator … must have a sense of the rhythm of speech patterns" and adds that "what the dramatic translator must watch out for particularly is an excess of sibilants in a sentence, or awkward consonantal clusters that may make a line hard to pronounce rapidly and thus may cause difficulties in sound projection."

With regard to the second trend, Aaltonen (1993:26) in her research on the manipulation of otherness in translated drama states that "the translator makes conscious or unconscious choices, which are not accidental by nature, but imposed on her/him by the system to which the completed translation will belong as an element." She even asserts further that the drama translator's survival as a translator depends on how willingly she/he follows the conventions of the system, or how tolerantly the system views different translational choices. She equally asserts that "In translation, foreign drama is transplanted into a new environment, and the receiving theatrical system sets the terms on which this is done. A play script must communicate and be intelligible at some level, even if it should deviate from existing norms and conventions" (Aaltonen, 1993:27).

Similarly Louise Ladouceur (1995:31) in her study aimed at evolving a descriptive analysis model for the translation of dramatic texts states that:

> Cette étude descriptive de la traduction n'a donc plus pour objet de déterminer une façon idéale de traduire, mais de voir plutôt comment on traduit, à quelles modalités translatives est soumis le texte afin de pouvoir fonctionner dans la langue et la littérature d'accueil comme équivalence d'un texte d'une autre langue, appartenant à une

autre littérature. De ce point de vue, toute analyse de la traduction doit nécessairement se rapporter à la fonction assignée à l'œuvre traduite dans son contexte adoptif.

For her part, Alena Moravkova (1993:35) in a study of the specific problems of drama translation states that, "chaque œuvre dramatique se situe par l'intermédiaire de sa traduction, à l'aide du médiateur — le traducteur — dans un contexte culturel nouveau."

Other proponents of the target text/target culture and reception oriented approach in drama translation include Annie Brissett (1990), Jean-Michel Déprats (1990), Susan Bassnett (1991), André Lefevere (1992) and Michèle Laliberté (1995).

The resultant translations emanating from this trend have been described and labelled in various ways. Researchers have, for example, referred to them or described them variously in English as *"adaptation," "rewriting," "version," "transplanting," "naturalising," "neutralising," "integrating foreign works," "large-scale amendments," "recreation," "transposition," "reappropriate,"* and in French as *"transposer complète-ment," "traduction ethnocentrique," "traduction-assimilation," "traduction totale," "déplacement," "déraciner de son contexte," "l'assimilation,"* etc.[1]

This proliferation of terminology suggests that scholars and researchers in the area of drama translation have been working (and probably continue to do so) in isolation. Research in this area could experience significant strides forward if research-ers carried out investigations or analyses with prior knowledge of others' works. That way they would be able to decide based on sufficient justification whether or not to coin new words to describe translation phenomena which are probably not unique to their own individual experiences.

What further compounds the proliferation of terms in this area is the fact that these researchers do not even bother to define the terms coined. While it could be supposed that all the above terms broadly refer more or less to the same translation reality or phenomenon, it could equally be argued that they have different semantic shades thereby suggesting various degrees of manipulation of the source text to meet the expectations of the target language audience as well as the requirements of the receiving culture. If these terms were clearly defined by their inventors it would probably enable other researchers to map on a continuum and even refine the vari-ous degrees or shades of this "same" phenomenon. It would probably also enable the manipulations involved in each case to be characterised. Finally, it would help shed light on what therefore constitutes translation proper.

As it is, the absence of clear and precise definitions for this abundant terminol-ogy sometimes leads to confusion. If we consider just the term "adaptation" for instance, Susan Bassnett (1985:93) declares that "The distinction between a 'version' of an SL text and an 'adaptation' of that text seems to me to be a complete red her-ring. It is time the misleading use of these terms were set aside." For other researchers such as Louise Ladouceur the difference between adaptation and translation proper is only quantitative in that it makes more frequent use of certain strategies which in any case are not unique to adaptation. Following research carried out to establish the relationship between drama translation and the receiving literary polysystem and socio-cultural context she declares that:

aucune des stratégies dont se réclame l'adaptation ne semble lui appartenir en propre. … l'analyse a révélé que les textes traduits et les textes adaptés font appel à des stratégies

translatives de même nature, mais à des fréquences et à des degrés variés. Ainsi, loin de constituer un mode translatif qualitativement distinct, l'adaptation se caractériserait plutôt de façon quantitative par un recours plus fréquent à certains procédés translatifs qui ne lui sont toutefois pas spécifiques (Ladouceur, 1995:37)

The above observation by Ladouceur equally raises the issue of defining the transfer strategies involved in each of the operations described by the coined terms in addition to characterising the respective elements or aspects involved. For example, if we consider the term "adaptation," it would be necessary to know specifically what is being adapted. Is it the action, space, time, culture-bound expression, style, etc. that is being adapted or does the process involve all of these aspects taken together? Do all these aspects call for the same strategies and procedures? And then, how are these strategies and procedures different from those used to effect translation proper?

Rey's (1991:23) definition of "adaptation" has equally raised polemics amongst scholars. For him, it is a "traduction très libre d'une pièce de théâtre, comportant des modifications nombreuses qui la mettent au goût du jour ou la rajeunissent." Some scholars (cf. Laliberté, 1995:526) consider this definition rather pejorative and carrying a negative connotation. In their view that adaptation precisely ought not to be (and is not) a very free translation involving several modifications. They assert that "il est possible d'adapter tout en demeurant fidèle au texte et à la pensée de l'auteur" (idem:526). In other words, one can adapt and yet remain faithful to the source text and the author's ideas.

It is thus evident from the examination of only one of the very many coined terms and expressions above that there is need to clearly define and clarify the notions they carry. It equally reveals the need for researchers and translation practitioners to stem further proliferation of terms which would only contribute in compounding the situation even further.

As a consequence of the two main conflicting trends highlighted in this paper, there has been (and there still is) a theoretical debate as to whether when translating a play the translator should preserve the foreign and exotic characteristics of the text or whether she/he should adapt and assimilate them into the target language and target culture. There seems to be no consensus yet among researchers and practitioners over this issue. Taking the Canadian context as an example, Laliberté (1995:520) observes as follows: "faut-il traduire le discours des personnages de pièces de théâtre en québécois, ou même en joual selon le cas? Il apparaît que les opinions sont partagées." Similarly Jane Koustas (1995:538) says the issue of whether or not to transpose and reappropriate "raises the much studied yet never resolved dilemma of allegiance …; should the translator 'invade, extract and bring home' … in order to attract a wider audience or 'traduire ou, mais sans traduire.'" Elsewhere she says:

Il est évident qu'en ce qui concerne la traduction de la mise en scène les deux démarches — "déraciner" la pièce de son contexte culturel et "n'y rien toucher" — ont toutes les deux leurs mérites ainsi que leurs praticiens (Koustas,1988:132-3)

Theatre semiotics has also contributed significantly to this debate. Elam (1980:1) first of all asserts the repercussions of semiotics in all domains by stating that:

Of all recent developments in what used to be confidently called the humanities no event has registered a more radical and widespread impact than the growth of semiotics.

> There scarcely remains a discipline which has not been opened during the past fifteen years to approaches adopted from … the general theory of signs.

In the same vein Pavis (1989:25-45) states that:

> translation in general and theatre translation in particular has changed paradigms: it can no longer be assimilated to a mechanism of production of semantic equivalence copied mechanically from the source text. It is rather to be conceived of as an appropriation of one text by another. Translation theory thus follows the general trend of theatre semiotics, reorienting its objectives in the light of a theory of reception.

Without going into details of slight differences in perception by various semioticians, what is evident is that semiotic analysis provides the audience, reader or theatre translator with a method not only of identifying the signs and situating them within the sign systems of the play but also of explaining the interdependence of sub-systems and their role in theatre communication.

By allowing for a multilevelled and multilayered reading of the drama text and analysis of the signs contained therein, the semiotic approach enables the drama translator to take into consideration the greatest number possible of all the elements to be transferred to the target text and target audience/culture. Some scholars (cf. Ladouceur, 1995:35-6) have thus evolved models of descriptive analysis of drama texts which enable the translator to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the text at the levels of the micro and macrostructures of the text as well as at the extralinguistic and metatextual levels.

However, it could be argued that the very multiplicity of dimensions and features to be taken into consideration in the analysis of theatre texts could on the contrary prove rather inhibiting when applied to a single text alone.

This notwithstanding, the semiotic approach could be considered a sort of bridge between the two conflicting trends in that while some researchers consider that in the final analysis, the decision whether to adapt or not is determined by ideological, political or artistic considerations, theatre semioticians are of the opinion that such a decision ought not to be based purely on the above factors but rather on the result of a systematic and objective analysis to determine and explain the importance and incidence of the "foreignness" as a sign and, where and how it is manifested. Theatre semiotics thus enables the mapping and subsequent transfer of the spatio-temporal setting, personal localisation of the dramatic action, parameters of the communicative situation, relationing of the characters with each other in terms of their social identities (relative status, group membership and general attitudes obtaining between interlocutors), extralinguistic information, etc., all of which are articulated through a large repertoire of verbal (lexical, grammatical, prosodic, paralinguistic) and non-verbal codes. In this regard, studies have revealed that different transfer strategies would be used by the translator depending on whether the translated play is intended only for reading or for performance (i.e, reading or acting editions — cf. Alvarez, 1993:19-21)2.

Whatever the case, the debate as to whether the translation of a play should be source-text or target text/reception oriented seems to us rather polarised and does not make allowance for various intermediate translations between the two extremes to meet other specific requirements or objectives. Furthermore, the arguments in support of each trend do not take into consideration the Translation Initiator (T1)3

who, in drama translation in particular, can often rightly be considered the driving force behind the act of translation and whose identity and express wishes could exert a fundamental influence on the translation operation. For example and with reference to the contemporary British policy as practised by the National theatre, Susan Bassnett (1991:101) states that "translators are commissioned to produce what are termed 'literal' translations and the text is then handed over to a well-known … playwright with an established reputation so that larger audiences will be attracted into the theatre." Elsewhere, Aaltonen (1993:31) talks of the common practice for the stage director to order a tailor-made translation for a particular mise en scène or cases where the translations are revised and fine-tuned by the stage team (stage director, dramaturge, playwright, etc).

These examples suggest that quite often in drama translation the strategic decisions or choices are not made by the translator but by someone else, i.e, the translation initiator who is one of the factors in the translation chain. Significant progress in the current debate could be made if proponents of both sides shifted their attention to a detailed study and analysis of the position and role of the translation initiator (T1) in the drama translation chain, the reasons and motivations underlying the decisions and choices of the T1, his/her perception of the expectations of the target audience (as distinct from that of the drama translator), and the strategies his/her strategic decisions inevitably or invariably compel the drama translator to adopt.

Furthermore, useful insights into the translation of this literary genre could be gained by increasingly focusing research activities on analyses of works translated by playwrights themselves, some of whom are even directors of their own plays. Such focus seems pertinent considering that these author-translators are at the same time the source, translation initiator and translator.

NOTES

1. Cf. Aaltonen (1993:26-7): rewriting, transplanting, naturalising, neutralising; Michèle Laliberté (1995:519-21): transposer complètement, adaptation, recréation; Jane Koustas (1988:129, 132): traduction-assimilation, déplacement, déraciner de son contexte; Jane Koustas (1995:529): Integrating foreign works, transpose, reappropriate, adaptation; Louise Ladouceur (1995:31, 36): adaptation, traduction ethnocentrique; Susan Bassnett (1991:101-2): large-scale amendments, rewriting, adaptation. This list is not even exhaustive.
2. On the distinction between plays meant to be staged and those meant to be read, also see Jane Koustas (1998:131), Raquel Merino Alvarez (1993:19-21), Susan Bassnett (1991:101-110; 1980:120, 123, 132), Alena Moravkova (1993:35), Aaltonen (1993:27-32).
3. This term was coined by Lance Hewson and Jacky Martin (1991:113).

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