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Poetry – Challenges of Untranslatability

Abstract

Translating a literary work is a very difficult task because of its relevant aesthetic and expressive values. The aesthetic values reflect the beauty of the writer's figurative language. The expressive values reflect the writer's thoughts and emotions. Hence, the translator must focus on transferring such values from the source language into the target language. As a separate genre of literature, poetry has something that makes it different from the others. Thus, the beauty of a poem does not result from diction, as is the case with novels and short stories, but also from rhythm, rhyme, meter, and particular expressions and structures, which may not match with those of the daily language user. In a word, translating of poetry much more attention and hard work than translating other literary genres. Through this paper, we aim to present some brief considerations about poetry translation, and offer certain considerations related to the procedure stages of translating a poem.

KEYWORDS: *poetry, aesthetic, translation strategies, untranslatability, challenges*

1. Introduction

Jacobson (1959, p.35), who is one of the famous linguists, defines translation as “whole message transference from source language into target language, rather than the substitution of single separate code unit.” According to this definition it is shown that the whole message involves a combination of all the components that are included in a text, such as: content, form, meaning, the text, semantic and physical features. In poetry translation the translator should make a decision to sacrifice the form for the content or the content for the form. According to (Boase Beier, 2009), translation of poetry is the most polemic issue caused by the existing conflict between form and content and also high figurative language of poetry. In translating poetry the translator needs more effort and creativity to translate the structures and the language full of figurative elements. Nida & Taber (1964, p. 126) stated that “the conflict between the dictates of form and content becomes especially important where the form of the message is highly specialized”. In poetry translation the form and content are much connected to each other and the total meaning of a piece of poetry is the result of the interaction of form and content. It is very difficult to separate content of poetry from its form because it causes much to be lost in translation.

For many scholars translation of literary work is challenging and the main concern of the translator is whether to prefer the content over the form or vice - versa. The most famous scholar Jakobson believes that “Poetry by definition is untranslatable... and it requires creative transposition.” (Venuti, 2000, p.118). But, according to other scholars like Dryden meanings and concepts can be translated and what is said in one language can be transmitted in another language. The theory of translation has raised a trend toward academic, generalizable and objective criteria, especially from the second half of the twentieth century (Bell, 1991; House, 2001; Melis & Albir 2001). Translating a literary work has always been seen as a very difficult task and more perplexing than translating other texts, such as law documents or business documents or some booklets that give instruction how to use machinery or tools or equipment. This difficulty results because literary works have specific values called the aesthetic and expressive values. The aesthetic function of the work shall emphasize the beauty of the words (diction), figurative language, metaphors, etc. The expressive values reflect the writer’s thoughts and emotions. And the translator should try, at his best, to transfer these specific values into the target language (TL).

Considering the fact that it is very difficult to understand poetry, the process to translate poetry is also very difficult and a complicated process. During his creation work, the translator may encounter some words which cannot be translated because of the existing cultural and linguistic differences among language systems. As one genre of literature, poetry has something special compared to the others. In a poem, the beauty is not only achieved with the choice of words and figurative language like in novels and short stories, but also with the creation of rhythm, rhyme, meter, and specific expressions and structures that may not conform to the ones of the daily language. In short, the translation of poetry needs ‘something more’ than translating other genres of literature. And in addition to having a perfect

understanding of both languages in translation a literary text the translator must have the gift of words, an artistic spirit and flair, the talent of a poet or a writer and the feel for the language. According to the definition of Robert Frost, “Poetry is what gets lost in translation.” By these words he meant that it is impossible to keep and to communicate from one language to other languages qualities such as rhythm, rhyme, meter, and particular expressions and structures. To translate poetry is difficult because poets speak with emotions and apply a variety of figures of speech such as rhythm, rhyme, tone and musicality is expressed through meters and cadence. And to translate poetry is often referred to be as an art. These words are best described in what Edgar Allan Poe definition “Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty in words”.

The difficulty of translating poetry bears two aspects: the words and meaning on the one hand, the flow and rhythm (or rhyme) on the other. Most translations of poetry are bad. This is mainly because the translator might know the foreign language too well and his or her language too poorly, whereas many other translations which are good because have an existence independent of the original. The most famously good translator is Edward FitzGerald, whose universally-known rendering of The Ruba’iyát of Omar Khayyám reads as if it were originally composed in English. In fact he re-wrote and re-ordered a selection of Khayyám’s verses, and sacrificed the original (rather obscure) meaning to fluency, thus creating not just a new poem in its own right, but a uniquely visionary poem of genius. This is why it is very important to know your language very well first and then try to translate a poem.

By taking into consideration some examples taken from well – known translators of poetry, this paper aims at suggesting some strategies that can be used by poetic translators and challenges of poetry untranslatability.

2. Poetry translation strategies

Nida and Taber (1969: 205) say that “to convey a message in translation is to relay the total meaning or content of a discourse; the concepts and feelings which the author intends the reader to understand and perceive”. According to Sperber and Wilson (1986), this message is a set of assumptions that the original communicator aims to express, and that includes what Simon Dik (1989: 9) has called “the full body of knowledge, beliefs, assumptions, opinions, and feelings available to an individual at any point of interaction”.

Translation of poetry should express the entire explicit information and the entire implicit information that is shown in the original text to all readers. If an original text shows problems of interpretation it can be settled by (a) making the translation more explicit or (b) maintaining the difficulty. In the latter case, the effort to understand the contextual implications could make the readers’ processing effort increase to a level that defies the aim of the translation (Gutt, 1991).

Translating poetry is a matter of relativity and for this fact aesthetic aspects of the original text of the poem cannot be transferred into the target language text. There

are a number of perfect masterpieces in the world of poetry which although it is difficult and somehow believed impossible to translate a poem these have shown that it is possible to translate poems. In order to develop a literary text, and in particular poetry as the most difficult genre of literary texts, translators should have some artistic genius.

There are different theories and methods used for poetry translation. Jones (1989) discusses four different levels or types of translation of poetry: Literal translation, Approximation, Adaptation and Imitation.

Holmes (1988, p.25), proposes four different strategies to translate the verse form:

1. Mimetic: the original form is retained.
2. Analogical: the cultural correspondence is used.
3. Organic: the semantic material takes on its own unique poetic structure.
4. Deviant/extraneous: the adapted form is in no way implicit of the original.

Andre Lefevere (in Bassnett-McGuire, 1980: 81-82) noted seven methods adopted by English translators in translating Catullus's poems: phonemic translation, literal translation, metrical translation, verse-to-prose translation, rhymed translation, free verse translation, and interpretation.

- Phonemic Translation: reproducing the source language sound in the target language.
- Literal Translation: word for word translation.
- Metrical Translation: reproducing the source language meter.
- Verse to Prose Translation: Distorting the sense, communicative values and syntax of Source text.
- Rhymed Translation: transferring the rhyme of the original poem into target language.
- Blank/free verse translation: finding just the proper equivalents in the target language with a proper semantic result.
- Interpretation: version and imitation. Version occurs when the absence of source
- Language text is retained and the form is changed. Imitation occurs when the translator produces the poem of his own.

Sen & Shaole (2010), suggest that Lefevere's classification of methods is useful for the cases in which either the source or the target language is English. They also say that the strategies are comprehensive enough and the elaboration on each strategy is well-defined Explanation given by Lefevere seems to reemphasize the opinion of Cluysenar's that the weaknesses of the poetry translation methods occur due to the emphasis given to one or some of the poetic components in the process of translating. The literal, metrical, and rhymed translation seem to emphasize the "form" or "poetic structure" of the poem; while the rest emphasize on the transferring of the precise meaning into the TL. Free vs. Literal Translation are two main strategies too familiar to the translators. In literal translation poetry is

rendered to either poetry or verse. The main characteristic of literal prose translation is the preference of the meaning over the form. In this case the translator's main concern is the meaning or content of the poetry, while in verse translation of poetry both form and content are of importance to the translator. As Frost (1969, p. 19) puts it "a prose translation of poetry, however deft its workmanship, cannot convey the effect which verse produces; if it could, why do poets take the trouble to write verse?".

Abbasi and Manafi Anari (2004) mention that literal verse translation itself can be subdivided into several categories. They also divide free translation strategy into some categories: Phonemic translation, Stanza imitation, Meter imitation, Imitation of rhyme scheme, Literal blank verse translation, and rhymed translation. According to Rose (1981) "The translator of poetry must be fluent in and sensitive to the source language; he must know the source language's cultural matrices, its etymologies, syntax, and grammar, as well as its poetic tradition. He must culturally and politically identify himself wholeheartedly with the original poet. He must penetrate the exteriority of the original text and lose himself in its intertextuality. To make the translation become a poem, the translator must also meet successfully the expectations and sensibilities of the poetic tradition of the target language. Thus, the most successful translators of poetry are frequently those who happen to be bilingual and bicultural and, above all, poets in the target language" (p. 136).

Dryden (as cited in Venuti, 2012, p. 38-42) had fully recognized the difficulties involve translation of poetry. He proposed three methods for poetry translating to overcome the dilemmas of poetry translating. Dryden prefers imitation over the metaphrase and paraphrase. A deliberate examination of imitation as a solution of translating poetry would not really maintain balance between the form and content of poetry. Dryden main concern in poetry is the way of preserving the thoughts of the author.

3. Facing the challenges of untranslatability

Literary translation is not an easy task. Each literary work has its own specific problems of translation. Of the four genres of serious literary, poetry is more difficult to translate. It is worth to explore the challenges that the literary translator faces in its efforts to rebuild the form, rhythm, meaning and imagery of poetry in another language, as well as suggested procedures to cope with such challenges. Dissimilarities, differences between poetic forms of the original language and the language of translation pose a challenge for translators of poetry. It is natural that every language has its own poetic distinctive forms. Adaptation and applicability issues have greater importance when choosing a form of poetry in the language of translation (Mary Massoud 1988 page 50). To accurately translate poetry, translators should be poets, who know the poetic forms of the original language and the language of translation. Equally important is that poets should have sensitivity when to translate a poem in verse and when to translate it into prose. After that, the translator must decide when to translate into free verse, and when the regular translate rhyming poetry, in columnar form. The decision is important,

due to the fact that cultures differ in the way they use or associated with different types of languages.

In some cases, the translator can choose to translate poetry into prose or in free verse. There are opinions that historical poetry dramas are better translated in prose than in verse. The reason is that prose can convey the sense of direct and precise language translation, and to maintain the spirit of historical facts and events narrated. Sometimes, it may be preferred translation of a poem in free verse. In attempts to mimic a poem in Albanian, for example, it may be impossible to transmit in English the Albanian features in phonetic level (for example, alliteration and assonance), which may not be less important than features meter and rhythm. Furthermore, the simulation could ask the translator to change dramatically connotative sense, in order to make language text translation to suit the desired form of string concatenation, poetry. Here, careful use of vocabulary that clearly belong to poetic registry, or one that has appropriate meaning in the context in which it is used, can compensate the loss of metrical and rhyming features (Dickens, James, Hervej, Sander, and Higgins, Ian, page 92).

Obviously there is a connection between the purpose and form of poetry (Basil, Hatim, and Mason Ian, 1994, page 12). In translation of lyric poetry it is preferred translation of all rhymed and regular poetry, such as songs and chants, in rhymed metrical regular. Undoubtedly, lyric poetry music is essential for conveying meaning, that is, it has a meaning, which, obviously, is no less important than the meaning of words. Another example is the translation of the psalms. A psalm has no fixed form, so his strings vary in length. As possible, the translator must creatively find its equivalents in the language of translation. So, the translation of songs and psalms, however accurate translation is, in some form, except with rhyming verses and regular, is likely to harm, distort, the purpose of poetry. On the other hand, during the translation of lyric poetry, which does not have a fixed form, the translator is free to choose the most appropriate form of poetic language translation reader. So, he produces a poem that has the characteristics of rhyme and rhythm of language translation.

Rime poses a challenge due to the fact that every language has its unique form, structure, rhyming patterns. For example, traditional models of language rhyming patterns change from rhyming translation of the original language. So, the translator who decides to use rhyme in translation of a poem must make a choice: Either use the rhyming style of the original language, which conveys to the reader the sound of foreign language translation, or to use a rhyming pattern, which sounds more natural to wear the readers of language translation, despite the significant loss in sound level.

Differences between metric models of the original language and the language of translation constitute the second problem area in the translation of poetry. So naturally, the translator cannot interpret the rhythm of a particular language into another language, despite his skills. In fact, he is not required to do so, because the rhythm of the original language makes no sense, nor connection with the reader's

language translation. Rather, the translator should transfer rhythms of translation language in equivalents corresponding to the original language, so that the reader of the translation language tastes them. Ultimately, the choice of meter depends on how the translator of experiencing situation prevailing in poetry. The length of the string determines meter in all languages. Style of complementary arrays is widespread in classical poetry and in modern poetry as well. According to this style, they bind to each other in terms of grammatical and semantic. During the translation of a poem with such features, the translator faces problems arising from the difference between meters, to which must be stopped and who do not need to stop. Another challenge is to balance the preservation of the image of a rhythmic meter of the original language, language translation, with its reproduction as a meter that is typical for language translation.

During the translation of poetry, a challenge arises from the fact that all poems have plural meaning. As Beiker (Mona Baker, 1992, page 152) suggests, it is not easy to determine “the basic meaning of a word or prepositional utterance / phrase with absolute certainty.” Naturally, most of the time, words have “blurred border / unclear”, and their meanings are disputed in large scale. In other words, every act of reading a poem is the act of translation itself. The notion of understanding the original language is “rogue”. Reading of poetry in the original language is only one of the whole range / range of possible meanings. S. Basneti (Susan Bassnet 1980, page 72) admits that between translation and interpretation there is no distinction: first translator reads / translates the original language, and then translates the language of the translation. Therefore, the translator is forced to make repeated attempts and much larger than the average reader, in order to correctly understand poetry.

Interlingua translation is likely to reflect the creative interpretation of the original language, made by the translator (Mona Baker 1992, page 82). The translator should try to conceive, how to capture with precision the possible meanings of the words of the original language, in order to convey them in language translation. Forcing readers to read the original language by the translator is a common error that occurs during the translation of poetry, because polyvalence is the essential feature of poetic discourse. Since the original language allows variety of reactions among readers of the original language, the task of the translator of poetry to preserve as much as possible the range of possible reactions among readers of language translation, keeping intact the potential meanings present in the original language. Thus, Newmark suggests that the translator can “translate the possible sense, and decide meaningless possible in an explanatory note, if he considers that this understanding is important.” (Peter Newmark, 2003, page 220).

The translator of poetry must be aware of the difference between reference meaning and poetic meaning. The task of the translator of poetry is not limited to the transmission of the meaning of words, that is, the reader may refer to the same thing that the poet has referred to the original language. It also includes tracking of meaning and producing the same effect as the original language. Unlike translation of scientific / technical, success in poetry translation does not depend on the degree

to which, from the standpoint preferential translation of approaching poetry in the original language, rather, it depends on other criteria, based on literary criticism and applications in language and writing. This is important, because the text is likely to produce meanings that are not physically present in it. Again, the difficulty in translating the poetry arises not only from changing planes of meanings, but also the need for a translator must recognize the cultural context of the language in question, to choose the word nearest to the author's meaning.

Translating the tone of the original language poet is the most challenging task, because embodies the attitude of the poet towards poetry of the author. Translation of tone in another language that is different from the literary conventions of the original language is obviously very difficult. As long as the understanding of poetry in the original language is "rogue " and is more accurately to describe the meaning conveyed by the translator, as interpretation of the meaning conveyed by the original author of the poetic text , cannot be proved that poetry has a tone or that there is only one true tone or "target".

The metaphor is a literary figure that much depends on understanding than the sound. It is defined as a literary figure based on the comparison, which is implied more than stated directly. To say he was a lion in battle. According to Newmark, metaphor has two purposes. The first is cognitive, that is, the reference purpose: To describe a process or state of mind, a concept, a person, an object, a quality or an action in more detail and more comprehensive way than is possible in the language of literal or physical. The second is aesthetic, that is, pragmatic purpose: to seduce the senses, arouse interest, to clarify, to satisfy, to enjoy, to surprise. (Peter Newmark, page 104). In general, during the translation of images, the most important principle is that the translation must give the same sense as the original, and should produce the same emotional effect. A metaphor can be universal, cultural, or individual. Newmark argues that metaphors are six types: dead, clichés, forgotten, tailored, and new (recent), and original.

Poetry translators may need to choose a suitable procedure for the translation of metaphor. Translators must have an aesthetic sensitivity to the images and symbols, as well as possess the skill / agility, effective way to select the effective tracking of meaning and metaphor, choosing among the many possibilities. Usually, cultural metaphors are more difficult to translate than universal or personal metaphors. Difficulty arises when local flowers and herbs are used as metaphors. To produce the same effect, the translator may have to create a metaphor culturally equivalent to the original language, or to convert the metaphor of the original language, to give proper meaning, or if possible, by added meaning metaphor, ie, semantically enriched metaphor.

Translator of poetry must reproduce the original metaphor scrupulously, though can cause culture shock to the reader of the translation language, which does not recognize the culture of the original language. Reader of the translation language should make some effort to understand the truth of metaphor, relying on the following verses. The reader should understand this background and, if he wants

to feel it, repeated reading is more likely to make it his property. When metaphor is recognized in the culture of language translation, the translator can transfer the image of the metaphor. However, if the translator considers metaphor important, his duty is to follow it, to put it in the language of translation and its culture (Peter Newmark, page 164)

During the translation of poetry, games are the hardest words to translate, because they carry restrictions due to meter. According to Newmark, games with words, in English, are the most common, because one syllable words arise frequently and easily. The simplest type of game with words is the use of two words that have the same shape and different meanings (Peter Newmark, page 217). A pun created either by using a single word, two words that are spelled a kind, or a group of words with the same pronunciation in their two possible meanings, usually aiming at causing laughter or amusement, and sometimes to strengthen understanding. Play with words, its effects depends on the combination pronunciation - meaning, in general, it is not repeated in other languages simply because the two languages are never the same. Translator of poetry must sacrifice games with words, simply because they carry restrictions due to meter. For example, when the aim of the game is just words causing laughter poet can compensate for this, choosing a game other words, with different meaning, but related to the source. If the two meanings of the word game are more important than the means, the poet can translate them, producing two incompatible meanings. When a play on words used in the original language poetry, to illustrate a language or speech, or a linguistic slippage, or when the meaning is more important than warning, poet should transfer, translate, in both meanings, and usually even explain it.

Alliteration and assonance are the most common patterns in poetry and thematic and expressive purposes. Alliteration is the repetition of consonant and vowel sounds identical, often at the beginning of words. Assonance is the repetition of words within the same sound or sounds heap. End sounds that are not defined as rhyming assonance. Both types can come together. Another challenge is the sound level designation, where the meaning of the word followed by the sounds of it. These features are called voice as sound symbolism, which has two forms. The first occurs when the sound of a word in the poems evoke / invoke other words, that are not present in the text. The second occurs when a sound appears in more than one word and establishes links between such words, by implication follows that of the others.

Translation of alliteration and assonance is a special translation challenge, as long as they depend on the repetition of sounds and carry restrictions due to the meter. It is clear that no translation language can reproduce the same sequence of sounds, as the language of the original, simply because the two languages are never the same from the standpoint sound. Translator facing as sound symbolism must decide what position he has, how much money to begin translating a poem. When deemed essential, while the goal of the translator is forwarding as possible the text of the message in the original language, translators will have to feed them through symbolism language translation language translation as sound. No doubt,

as sound symbolism will be different from that of the original language. Poet translator is able to compensate the loss of voice features of the original language, replacing them with voice features language translation, which has a comparable effect. Usually, this causes losses in terms of meaning and connotative denotative. Within the field of literary translation, more time is devoted to examining the problems of translation of poetry than any other literary form. Many of the studies that deal with the review of these problems are translations or different assessments of a single act, or formulations own special translators on how they act to solve problems (Burton Raffel). Quite often, studies of poetry and translation seek to discuss the problems of methodology by non-empirical positions, however, this is exactly the kind of study that remains the most valuable and most needed.

4. Conclusion

In closing this paper, it is pertinent to note that it should never be forgotten that the work is not to translate the language in the language, but “poetry” in “poetry” and “poetry” is a soul so fragile that during its casting from one language to another language, it may evaporate altogether, if the expression is added to a young soul, then from it will remain nothing but a corpse without burial.

And this paper aims to illuminate the way to lead the translator to translate “poetry” in “poetry” without killing the spirit and without removing its source soul.

In order to achieve the better literary results in the difficult duty of translating poetry, the advantage is to receive some relevant instructions and trainings for the translators who are interested in poetry. Translators in the field of poetry will find useful to have knowledge on the existing strategies for translation of poetry which are proposed by different scholars.

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