

TRANSLATING A TEXT ON ARTS AS A CHALLENGE**LE DÉFI DE TRADUIRE UN TEXTE SUR L'ART****TRADUCEREA UNUI TEXT DESPRE ARTĂ – O PROVOCARE****Maria ALEXE**

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Abstract *Translating texts referring to art and architecture is part of what is generally known as specialized translations. Why is this type of translation a challenge for the translator? It is because this type of text operates not only with specialized terms like all specialized translation, but also with some foreign not translated terms (mainly French and Italian) and a large number of coined terms created by those who want to increase their accuracy, aspects to which we should add metaphorical language as well. This paper starting point consists in some translation theories but underlines the communication aspects of translation. In order to express the author's opinion concerning this topic some texts samples were considered as case studies.*

Résumé *La traduction des textes sur l'art et l'architecture est partie de ce qu'on appelle traduction spécialisée. Pourquoi est-ce qu'on considère cette traduction un défi pour le traducteur? Parce que ce type de texte opère non seulement avec des termes spécialisés comme beaucoup des traductions dans cette catégorie, mais aussi avec une terminologie ayant son origine dans autres langues (surtout de l'italien et le français) et avec beaucoup d'autre termes calqués par ceux qui veulent exprimer une certaine caractéristique et on ajoute à cela le fait qu'on emploi le langage métaphorique également. Cet article a comme point de départ les théories sur la traduction des textes de spécialité mais on considère aussi le respect de la fonction de communication de la traduction. On a chois quelques textes considérés comme études des cas pour souligner clairement la position de l'auteur.*

Rezumat *Traducerea textelor referitoare la artă și arhitectură se încadrează în ceea ce numim traducere specializată. De ce considerăm această traducere o provocare pentru traducător? Pentru că acest tip de text operează nu doar cu termeni specializați ca în cazul multor tradceri din această categorie, ci și cu o terminologie provenită din alte limbi (mai ales italiană și franceză) și cu mulți termeni calchiați de cei care doresc să exprime o anumită caracteristică, aspect la care se adaugă faptul că operează și cu limbajul metaforic. Lucrarea de față pornește de la teoriile privind traducerea textelor de specialitate, dar are în vedere mai ales respectarea funcției de comunicare a traducerii. Pentru a exprima clar poziția autoarei au fost alese câteva texte care sunt considerate studii de caz.*

Keywords - *specialized translation, communication, localization, art language*

Mot clés - *traduction spécialisée, communication, localisation, langage artistique*

Cuvinte cheie - *traducere specializată, comunicare, localizare, limbaj artistic*

1. Introduction

Art text translation started to be a common practice in the second half of the 19th century. For Romanian cultural environment the practice is more recent. From early ages translation has been a way of communication, because it was able to make a text understandable by transferring its meaning from one language (L1) to another (L2) contributing to avoid communication gaps and to make a step forward for a better understanding. In Ancient Times, in the Roman Empire, although Greek was the fashionable language, all documents were written in Latin and from time to time they needed a translation in local languages. This was just the beginning. From that time, along Middle Age and Renaissance, Latin turned into a Lingua Franca. The same role was played by French in the 19th century. They were diplomatic and cultural languages. In order to have a complete picture of translation's evolution we have to add the religious texts written in sacred languages like Latin (for Catholic Western World), Slavic and Greek (Orthodox, Est.-European countries). All the holy books were written in those languages considered to be appropriate for religious messages and people just listened to, understanding what priests told them in their own language (adapted texts or mainly abstracts of original texts). When the Bible was translated in local languages, this work was considered as the root of national literary language.¹

When the Ottoman Empire developed they had to establish different types of relationships with the conquered countries as well as with their western competitors. War treaties, trade agreements, legal rights are the main subjects of different diplomatic meetings assisted by translators. It was the time when specialized translation started, as different terms were used for religious books, army or trade. Things were not considerably different in the Hapsburg empire. It is true that German and Hungarian were official languages, but a large part of population living in Czechia, Slovenia, Transylvania need a

Romanian cultural synchronization also defined as synchronicity with the European cultural and technological progress was a major aim in the first part of the 20th century. This aim could be achieved which a lot of translations from different domains. Translation represented a communication bridge at the time and enabled us to understand the models and to create a frame for future achievements.

This period was also the one when art critique developed in Romanian culture. At the beginning genuine terminology was rather poor and that is why once again translation was necessary, but not enough for expressing Romanian art tendencies. Therefore localization and adaptation as well as all kind of coined terms were necessary strategies.

As translation developed and its addressability increased and the domains enlarged, it turned into a specialized domain and just knowledge of two languages was not enough for a good translation. Therefore a theoretical background started to develop. At the end of the 50s two authors Vinay & Darbelnet in "Comparative Stylistics of French and English: A Methodology for Translation" (1958 French version; 1995 English), presented translation as a process of "decoding" two "codes", from source language (SL) and target language (TL), dividing translation methods into two main categories **direct (literal) decoding**, which focuses on smaller structures, trying to give an equivalent for words or structures of words, and **indirect (oblique) decoding**, which tries to obtain the most narrating transformations of bigger units, at times modifying the phrase structure in accordance with different grammatical aspects and in harmony with the cultural context, in order to give the most accurate alternative when there is no equivalent. Even if quite old already this theory can be used successfully in art and architecture texts.

2. Defining Art and Architectural Texts

When talking about specialized translation, a scientific attitude implies defining the field to which translator has to adapt. Art and architectural texts refer to description (artifact, art work or historical

¹ The most well known case is that of Luther who translated the Bible in German. The case of Romanian (literary language) is almost the same because the translation of the Bible in 1688 represents the establishment of Romanian literary language.

site), art history, text books and criticism. Not all those texts are addressed to specialists, some of them are meant to build a bridge between the large public, creators and evaluators. That means that they have to pay a larger attention to communication aspects, in other words, to the way in which they deliver the message. That is why the author himself use specialized terms in a context which is supposed to clarify the meaning.

Although art texts translation has started (in Romanian culture) almost one century ago, the present paper will refer to challenges of today translation. Before the 60 the Romanian literacy system did not have a proper translation policy referring to what is going to be translated (selection of valuable/interesting works) or how they are going to be translated. (BÂRSAN, Roxana, 2010, 43). Even-Zohar underlined that translation is selected due to the language and author's economic, political and cultural prestige. (EVEN – Zohar, 1990, 54). Some terms were not properly translated, because the translator did not find the equivalent, they were just adapted². Between the wars French was the leading language of society, mainly the language of culture. Therefore most of the translations were from that language, even if the original text was in other languages, for example English. In the 21st. century things changed, English has become leading language and most of the texts are from that language. The economic criteria refers to the economic power of the country using the language, but also the fact that publishing houses are mostly interested in literature that would sell quickly, a consequence being the ignorance of aesthetic criteria.

Today that sort of selection of what is going to be translated has not changed entirely, but the tendency to use translation as an advertising vehicle to promote certain cultures has improved the quality of translated texts and contributed to improve communication between artists from different continents. This aspect is clear when we consider literary texts, but started to influence translation of art texts as well.

3. Research Questions

When somebody reads an art text in English will be facing quite a large number of Italian and French terms as well as coined terms. The question for the translator is:

1. Should he/she live them like that and translate only the English text?
2. Should he/she translate them in Romania?

The last research question leads to some secondary questions.

1. Does he/she have to adapt/localize those terms to Romanian art and cultural context?
2. Which strategy has to be used in order for coined terms? If they are semantically translated do they suggest the same in L2 as in L1?

There are quite simple questions, at least apparently, yet a correct answer is not a very easy issue.

4. Theoretical Background

If in the 19th century, even in the first half of the 20th century, translation was quite poetical and relayed on the translators' gift, being done due to the author's inspiration and deep language knowledge. Things change in second half of the 20th. century when a lot of theoretical work appeared in order to help translators to take the correct decision when translating. There are features which make the difference between texts that are using specialized languages which divide them into categories according to the communication means.

Katharina Reiss identifies four types of texts: Informative, expressive, operative and audio medial. Some of art texts can be listed under the heading **informative**, because they refer to *plain communication of facts* and offer information about an art work or architectural monuments. On the other hand, texts which are exhibition review or critical analysis of different art work or architectural achievements are **operative** because they influence and persuade the reader. Such type of texts also includes images, visual aids which contribute to clarify the text and help understanding. Can we consider as **audio medial**? In my opinion as an art curator and a translator

² Some of the translators did not have a proper scientific background which could enable them to make an accurate adaptation of terms.

the answer should be affirmative, because the author selected the images in order to improve the message.

In order to examine the translation of a text, it is important to keep in mind what type of text it is and to identify the aspects that are of great importance in delivering the message (DROBOT, Ana Irina – 2010, 55).

Another aspect which should be taken into consideration is the receiver of the translated text. If this is a person accustomed to language used by art specialist the translator does not need to translate the specialized terms from French and Italian as well as the coined terms because they are already familiar for the reader. Sometimes the text addresses to all kind of readers and in this case the translator concern refers to the fact that in a way or another he/she should make all the terms understandable for everybody.

5. Sample Texts – Case Studies

The first text is taken from a text book concerning restoration and conservation. It is a text written in American English by a specialist for his students and other people who want to learn restoration and conservation (quite a specialized target public) and it has no images to decode understanding. That is why all the terms need to be translated, even if some of them are in other languages than English.

This is a sample text:

Modern painters have executed murals in tempera on walls coated with gesso, as one would paint an easel painting in tempera on a gesso panel, a procedure inspired, no doubt, by the artists experience in and preference for the tempera technique. The effect is usually adequately satisfactory, and with it painters have simulated the typical fresco effect with a tolerable degree of success, but the method has a certain technical defects. The possibility of safely cleaning such murals is doubtful; the cleaning of tempera paintings requires professional restoring methods, and these are difficult to apply to a vertical wall. Gesso applied directly to old walls of either lime plaster or the more commonly found magnesium or gypsum finishing plaster is of doubtful permanence because of the difference in structural properties of two materials. In principle, the coating can be compared to one of the commercially prepared casein or glue wall paints; these materials have to be applied in the form of a very thin coating and may crack if piled up over plaster to the thickness of the average gesso application. Plaster walls, unless erected strictly in accordance with approved methods, do not always, present the proper uniform surface for permanent adhesion of comparatively heavy coating with aqueous binders.

This text reveals some problems that a translator faces in translating and adapting art text for Romanian public. First of all there are several terms which need a special attention. For some of them as for example *coated* that occurs several times in the same paragraph, the translator's job is facilitated by the context itself which enables the reader, possible student to choose the correct meaning of the term. When it comes to *gesso* things are completely different, because this is an Italian word which was chosen by the author in order to define a special material which requires special technology. It is used when we talk about fresco painting and for painting in general.

| Word | Origin | Dictionary definition | Possible translation Text context; Similar context |
|--------|---------|---|--|
| coated | British | Covering a surface | Îmbrăcat; învelit, |
| gesso | Italian | A brilliant white penetration of glue and burned gypsum used as ground in the Middle Ages to prepare surface of a wooden panel or other surfaces before painting. <i>Gesso</i> can also be used as a coating on wooden furniture and | tencuială, grund for fresco Tratament de baza înainte de aplicarea foitei |

| | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|---|--|
| | | picture frames prior to gilding. (Oxford Concise Dictionary of Art Terms.) | |
| fresco | Italian – fresh | Technique of wall painting consisting in application of pure powder pigments mixed only in water the color become an integrated part of wall | Fresca – the term was taken from Italian |
| lime plaster | | A soft mixture, generally composed of lime and mixed with sand and other substances Has been used since Ancient time for sculpture and for lining walls | Ghips |
| panel | | Any flat, rigid support such as wood or metal, prepared with a ground for painting upon | Panel, support , suprafața |

When talking about words of different origins which occur without translation in many art and architecture texts it must be underlined that some are quite frequent and generally speaking they do not need a translation. It should be mentioned. *plain air* (French) used in the context of painting and sketching en plein air) *quadratura* (Italian) used to name illusionary painting in which architectural elements of a wall or ceiling painting appear to be part of the real architectural settings or *fresco*(Italian) which refers to the special technique of wall painting. But when terms as panel or gesso occur the translator has to translate them in L2 and has to pay attention to the context.

The second text which was selected as a case study refers to Frank Lloyd Wright the famous American architecture. It is a text which tries to present his personality and analyses his work. If we turn back to Katherine Reiss classification is an informative text which from time to time turns into an operative one.

When young Frank took the difficult decision to turn down the opportunity to study in Europe, this fact strengthened his determination to search for a new and appropriate Midwestern architecture.

Other young architects were searching in the same way; this trend became known as the “[Prairie school](#)” of architecture. By 1900 Prairie architecture was mature, and Frank Lloyd Wright, 33 years old and mainly self-taught, was its chief practitioner. The Prairie school was soon widely recognized for its radical approach to building modern homes. Utilizing mass-produced materials and equipment, mostly developed for commercial buildings, the Prairie architects discarded elaborate compartmentalization and detailing for bold, plain walls, roomy family living areas, and perimeter heating below broad glazed areas. Comfort, convenience, and spaciousness were economically achieved. Wright alone built about 50 Prairie houses from 1900 to 1910.

The terms which are difficult to translate is *prairie architecture* and *prairie house*, which happens to be key terms of a text describing one of the architect’s achievements. Of course is quite easy to refer to the frontier myths and Far West nostalgia, but this is not enough for Romanian public. The text also mentions *Midwestern architecture* as one of Lloyd’s aim in developing original American architecture, therefore east and not west.

According to Britannica Encyclopaedia the definition of a *prairie house* is the following

Prairie houses and other buildings were generally two-story structures with single-story wings. They utilized horizontal lines, ribbon windows, gently sloping roofs, suppressed, heavy-set chimneys, overhangs, and sequestered gardens.

It is a correct definition, but too long for a translation and refers to the prototype which inspired Frank Lloyd Wright. A translator is sometimes in the position to use an explication in order to

achieve an accurate translation. This is such a case, because the translator has to offer a text which suggests the shape of the architect's design.

6. Conclusions

This research started with the question that a translator is asking himself when translating an art/architecture text, a question concerning the translation of terms which are not from the same language as the whole text. After analyzing the theoretical background and the case studies it is obvious that a straight answer yes or no cannot be given because the translator's attitude depends on how much the possible target public of the translation know about its meaning. If we refer to the sample texts the word *fresco* does not need a translation when *gesso* and *prairie houses* should be translated.

One of the secondary research questions refers to the adaptation/localization of terms to Romanian art and cultural context. The analysis leads to the conclusion that for some of the terms a simple semantic translation is not enough. For example the term *prairie houses* needs explanations and adaptation to Romanian context in order to understand the new approach of the American architect. Finally the conclusion is that art translation no matter if the text is a real technical one or just a text which offers explanations for the large public, is not just a semantic one. A cultural context has to be added in order to facilitate communication and deliver a clear message. Of course such a paper refers to a limited number of examples which are evaluated along a certain period of time. Therefore the conclusions can always be changed due to new research and a change in the cultural context.

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