

Translation: Manipulation or Communication?

La traduction: manipulation ou communication?

Traducerea: manipulare sau comunicare?

Irina-Ana DROBOT

Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest
Department of Foreign Languages and Communication
124 Lacul Tei Blvd., sector 2, București
anadrobot@yahoo.com

Abstract

The paper tries to understand, from a sociological and linguistic perspective, to what extent there is manipulation in any translation and whether it is intentional or simply a result of the possibilities of language. Manipulation implies a distortion of the original message, while communication refers to a faithful translation. The translator's visibility is discussed with respect to the extent it influences the resulting translations; domestication and foreignization are also discussed. The translator's role in spreading knowledge shows that translation can be successful communication. The status of the translator offers insight into the way translations are regarded, as means of communicating the original message, or distorting it. According to narratological theories, the translator's point of view is the same as the narrator's.

Résumé

L'article tente de comprendre, à partir d'un point de vue sociologique et linguistique, dans quelle mesure il y a une manipulation dans toute traduction et si elle est intentionnelle ou le résultat des possibilités du langage. La manipulation implique une distorsion du message d'origine, tandis que la communication fait référence à la prestation d'une traduction fidèle de l'original. La visibilité du traducteur influence les traductions qui en découlent; la domestication et la foreignization sont aussi discutées. Le rôle du traducteur dans la diffusion des connaissances montre que la traduction peut être une communication réussie. Le statut du traducteur offre un aperçu sur traductions comme des moyens de communiquer le message d'origine, ou de le distorsionner. Pour la narratologie, le point de vue du traducteur n'est pas différent de celui du narrateur.

Rezumat

Scopul articolului este de a înțelege, printr-o perspectivă sociologică și lingvistică, în ce măsură există o manipulare în orice traducere și dacă o astfel de manipulare este intenționată sau pur și simplu un rezultat al posibilităților de limbaj. Manipularea implică o denaturare a mesajului original, în timp ce comunicarea acestuia se referă la redarea fidelă a acestuia. Vizibilitatea traducătorului influențează traducerile rezultate; termenii precum domestication și foreignization sunt de asemenea discutați. Rolul traducătorului în răspândirea cunoașterii arată că traducerea poate fi o comunicare de succes a unui mesaj. Statutul traducătorului oferă o idee despre modul în care traducerile pot comunica mesajul original, sau distorsiona. Pentru naratologie, punctul de vedere al traducătorului nu este diferit de cel al naratorului.

Keywords: *Extra-linguistic knowledge, narratology, point of view, translator's visibility.*

Mots-clés: *Connaissance extra-linguistique, narratologie, point de vue, la visibilité du traducteur.*

Cuvinte cheie: *Cunoștințe extra-lingvistice, naratologie, punct de vedere, vizibilitatea traducătorului.*

Motivation

When we ask the question whether a translation is faithful or not, we may also imply other questions: is the original meaning distorted, or are the readers manipulated by the translation? Also, when we think about a faithful translation, we think about an effective way of communicating the contents of the original by the translated version.

Is this manipulation of the meaning of the original intentional or is it just the effect of the way different languages can shape different realities? According to Edward Sapir, "No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality." [4] Hermans, a critic from the Manipulation School, believes that there is always, to a certain extent, a manipulation of the meaning of the original in the case of translations. The paper will analyse situations which can offer insight into the issue. The linguistic as well as the social perspectives will be taken into account. The role of the translator is significant; the result of his work, the translation, is then analysed with respect to faithfulness, the translator's visibility or invisibility, foreignization and domestication. An analysis of the translator's status shows us that in the beginning, communication was the main purpose of translations. Manipulation may be just an accidental result, perceived as such due to the structures of the target language.

Can we say that the translator intervenes with his own point of view in a translation? Narratology makes no distinction between original and translation. Moreover, the translator's point of view is not regarded as different from the narrators'. However, is this always the case? What insights may we find in the theories concerning the translator's visibility or invisibility?

Faithful translations and the possibilities of language

What does a faithful translation mean? Should translators go for fidelity to the letter or for fidelity to the spirit? Do all languages offer the exact same possibilities of expression? Can we call a literal translation a faithful one?

If we take the example of poetry, what aspects of translation should be taken into account for a good translation? A "good translation of poetry provides the reader with a similar effect to that gained by reading the original text." [1] Thus, according to Asi, something else is taken into account for a good translation, something other than a faithful aspect as far as language is concerned. The reader is taken into account, as the reader is important for both original and translation. Since poetry is supposed to draw sympathy from its readers, to impress them, a translation of a poem should do the same.

A word for word translation, or a translation which would stick as much as possible to the original language, is not a truly good one:

"The act of faithful translation has been described this way: 'We cannot Xerox a poem from one language to another though we can make a rough copy. This means, of course, that we may have to add some words or omit others, that we may, and invariably need to, change the syntax, and that, sometimes, we may even have to tamper with the original poem's form.'" [5]

John Felstiner, in *Translating Neruda*, seems to reflect along the same lines:

"Bring over a poem's ideas and images, and you will lose its manner; imitate prosodic effects, and you sacrifice its matter. Get the letter and you miss the spirit, which is everything in poetry; or get the spirit and you miss the letter, which is everything in poetry. But these are false dilemmas... Verse translation at its best generates a wholly new utterance in the second language — new, yet equivalent, of equal value." [2]

Whereas Asi underlines the idea that a translation of a poem should have the same effect as the original on the reader, Felstiner underlines the idea that a translation of a poem should be like a copy but of equal value. It seems, therefore, that just looking at the issues of faithful translations vs adaptation is rather superficial. There is so much more to translation. There are so many details to be taken into account, not just language itself, which differs in syntax, vocabulary, possibilities of representing certain realities, but also the effect on the reader and the value of a translated poem. In this case we cannot speak about a manipulation of the original message, since all the efforts are focused on getting the same message to the reader, with means adapted to another language and another culture.

The translator's visibility or invisibility

Could aspects such as the translator's visibility or invisibility influence the result of translations as communication or manipulation? It seems that being faithful to the original means that there is an invisible translator, as Venuti confirms:

“Venuti (1995:1) contends that the illusory transparent effect created by a good translation conceals the hard work gone into it. He goes on to use the term invisibility to describe the translator's situation and activity in contemporary Anglo-American culture, and questions the marginal position of translation (ibid: ix).” [3]

The translator's work is thus considered marginal in contemporary Anglo-American culture. When a translator tries hard to do a faithful translation, he remains invisible. This is because he does not bring a distortion to the original message; he just tries to render the original message as accurately as possible. When this happens, the reader will just feel the original writer's voice. For instance, if the translator does not bring significant alterations to a text, if he does not bring into his translation elements of his own culture, then readers will not feel his voice. The translator's low status in society is opposed to his high status in relation to the text:

“Whilst authors such as Bassnett (1988, 1995, 1996) and Venuti (1995, 1998) are making reference to the translator's low position within society, most current discussion seems to centre on the translator's relationship to the text and on the function of the target text within a socio-cultural context. Bassnett (1996: 22) goes as far as to mention that in the last decade of the twentieth century the key word was ‘visibility’. Nevertheless she, like Toury (1980, 1995), focuses more on the power that a translator has in relation to the text rather than his relation to society as a professional being.” [3]

The way a translator is invisible can be understood on different levels: a translator may be invisible professionally speaking, since his status is not too good in Anglo-American culture. However, invisibility has other aspects, namely those related to the text. In this case, a translator may be invisible when he does not intervene in a visible way in the translated text, so that the reader won't identify a translation as such:

“In *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995), Venuti discusses invisibility in the canon of English translation. However, he is discussing ‘textual invisibility’, debating whether a translation should be identifiable as such. There are different types of invisibility that concern a translator. Camozzi and Rodrigues Gesualdi also support this view, distinguishing between ideological, idiomatic and professional invisibility. The first two ‘invisibilities’ are text-related [...]” [3].

In Venuti's opinion, invisibility refers to a fluent translation, as well as to the translator's status. A fluent translation, aside from being regarded as a good translation, may be regarded as a way of manipulation since it is demanded or considered acceptable by publishers or readers. In this way, the translator's work may be regarded as trying to appeal to a certain audience and for these changes are made. On the other hand, trying to appeal to an audience does not necessarily involve manipulation, but just effectively communicating the message of the original text. If the translated text sounds natural, this is simply the sign of a good translation, of effective communication and not of trying to deceive an audience. We are told that:

“Venuti sees this invisibility as typically being produced:

1 by the way translators themselves tend to translate ‘fluently’ into English, to produce an idiomatic and ‘readable’ T T, thus creating an ‘illusion of transparency’;

2 by the way the translated texts are typically read in the target culture:

A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or non-fiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text - the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the ‘original’.” (Venuti 1995: 1) [6]

To conclude, Venuti suggests the following types of invisibility: ideological, idiomatic, and professional. Ideological invisibility has to do with the way a translation is considered acceptable for a certain audience. Idiomatic invisibility has to do with a fluent translation. Professional invisibility has to do with the translator’s status. These aspects related to invisibility lead to questions regarding a good, faithful translation. A good translation seems to be regarded as a text which does not seem a translation, but is just a natural text like the original. This seems to fit the definition of a faithful translation. However, certain adaptations are implied since the translated text is supposed to sound very natural. In this case, we deal with fidelity to the spirit, not to the letter.

Domestication and foreignization

A question we may ask is: to what extent can a translator remain invisible? Moreover, does this mean that he adapts the translated text to suit the readers’ cultural realities or does this mean that he maintains the aspects of a foreign culture?

Venuti distinguishes between two aspects in a translation: domestication and foreignization. These two aspects seem to offer an idea on what is a good translation and where translation may be regarded as manipulation more than as communication.

First, domestication refers to a fluent translation, where the translator is regarded as invisible, where the translated text is just as natural in style as the original. The problem with this approach lies in the idea that the foreign text is reduced to the cultural values of the language in which the text is translated. Moreover, it seems that only the texts which may be domesticated are selected for translation and which thus fit into the respective literary canon. Thus, we notice that there is manipulation at work in this case since the reality of the translated text is changed to some extent.

“Venuti (1995: 21) sees domestication as dominating Anglo-American translation culture.

Just as the postcolonialists are alert to the cultural effects of the differential in power relations between colony and ex-colony, so Venuti (1995: 20) bemoans the phenomenon of domestication since it involves ‘an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to [Anglo-American] target-language cultural values’. This entails translating in a transparent, fluent, ‘invisible’ style in order to minimize the foreignness of the TT. Venuti allies it with Schleiermacher’s description of translation that ‘leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him’ (Schleiermacher 1813/1992: 41-2; chapter 2). Domestication further covers adherence to domestic literary canons by carefully selecting the texts that are likely to lend themselves to such a translation strategy (Venuti 1997: 241).” [6]

Foreignization is also referred to by Venuti as resistancy. Here the translator is visible in the sense that the translated text is clearly recognized as such. In this case, the foreign identity of the original is visible in the translated text and thus it is protected from “the ideological dominance of the target culture”. [6] We may say that, from the point of view of protection from the dominance of the target culture, there is no manipulation in such translations. The reader perceives a foreign culture through the translated text, just as it is described in the original text, or as close to that as possible, due to the possibilities of language.

Foreignization “entails choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language” (Chapter 9). “Venuti (1995: 20) considers the foreignizing method to be ‘an ethnodeviant pressure on [target-language

cultural] values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad'. [...] the foreignizing method can restrain the 'violently' domesticating cultural values of the English-language world. The foreignizing method of translating, a strategy Venuti also terms 'resistancy' (1995: 305-6), is a non-fluent or estranging translation style designed to make visible the presence of the translator by highlighting the foreign identity of the ST and protecting it from the ideological dominance of the target culture." [6]

We can say that even in such cases, the use of these strategies, domestication and foreignization, is determined mainly by the possibilities of language. For example, how should a dialect be translated, other than by another dialect, in order to ensure fidelity to the spirit? By doing this, however, one may say that here we have made use of domestication. This is true, yet is the use of standard language in such a case a good solution? And what about proper names? What other choice is there but to keep them as in the original text and thus to make use of foreignization?

The translation's and translator's role in spreading knowledge

Once we analyse the resulting translations, we may also look at the purposes of translations in history. In very old times, translations were used to spread knowledge, a role which is closer to communication than to manipulation. The role of translations is strongly tied to that of the translators'.

If we look throughout history, we notice that the translators' role was to spread knowledge, thus to communicate the message of the original text. Science was spread among various cultures in the past due to translations:

"Translation has played a major part in the movement of scientific knowledge between cultures, from Ancient Greece to Persia, from Indian to Arab nations, and from the Islamic Middle East into Christian Europe. The language of science has in turn been Greek, Arabic, Latin and now English, and it was with the help of translators that this transition occurred and that scientific knowledge was shared between cultures.

Europe of the 13th century, and in particular Spain, was interested in learning about the huge advances made in science in the Middle East, and this created a stimulus for translators to translate Arabic works into Latin. The Translation School of Toledo translated a great number of books from Arabic into Latin, both original Arab works and those previously translated into Arabic from Syriac and Greek." [3]

It seems that those translations were good translations, since science is exact and should be transmitted without adaptations which would change very important details. Translators have also played an important part in "the revival of culture". During those times, the translators benefitted from a very good place in society. Once again, by transmitting a message correctly between cultures, translations seem to have been faithful and served as communication not as manipulation:

"One of the most important periods of cultural revival in which translators participated was the Italian Renaissance. Knowledge of classical Greek had largely disappeared from Western Europe after the collapse of Roman hegemony. Ancient Greek and Classical Latin were hard to understand, and people had lost knowledge of the religion and culture of these ancient societies. A revival in knowledge of Classical Latin led to a desire to read the Greek authors who were so frequently quoted.

In the search for lost knowledge, translators such as Petrarch, Bruni, and Ficino, often sponsored by wealthy and politically involved patrons, went on quests for new manuscripts and rediscovered many lost texts, such as the first complete Quintilian discovered by Poggio. Furthermore, the translators of this period not only translated the texts, but they acted as educators, explaining the texts to the people.

The cultural contribution of translators was such that Deslisle and Woodsworth (ibid:101) highlight the fact that translators of history should not be regarded as passive conduits of specialized information, but rather as agents fully implicated in the work they reformulated and

indeed translation in Renaissance Europe was a primary activity, and translators were held in high regard.

In the words of Giordano Bruno, an Italian philosopher during the Renaissance, ‘from translation, all science had its offspring’ (quoted by Gross; 2004).” [3]

Translators have also played an important part in communicating “the word of God”, in religious translations: “Mainstream religions are primarily text-based and translators played a seminal role in the dissemination of the word of God.” (Leech 2005) In all these examples, therefore, translations have served their purpose in communicating the message.

The status of the translator

The way the translator is perceived by his audience should also offer insight into the way the resulting translations work. Once we look at the status of the translator, we can see what is expected of him, as well as how his translations are received.

In contemporary Anglo-American society, translators and translations have a low status, while things were entirely different in the past. In the past, translators were regarded as very effective communicators and transmitters of knowledge. What happened? What led to a change in perception regarding translators and their work? According to Susan Bassnett, it all started with the invention of the printing press, when the idea of original and copy gained foreground. Then, translations were not being regarded as valuable as the original. The original was thus regarded as valuable, while any translation was regarded as a betrayal of the original text.

“Gross (1995) claims that until the middle of the 16th century, translators had been viewed as champions for their role in the transmission of cultural knowledge, science and learning. He views this period as a watershed in the history of translators and a time after which people’s attitudes towards the discipline began to change as from that point onwards, increasing emphasis was put on the inadequacy of translators and the second rate status of translations compared to the ‘true’ and ‘original’ source text.

Prior to the invention of Johannes Gutenberg’s moveable type printing press in Germany, all copying and translation had been done by hand. It was common practice for the translator to add his own prefaces or explanatory notes. The idea therefore of the ‘one author’ of a text was poorly defined. Bassnett (1996) explains that the invention of printing introduced the idea of authorship, and an original text and thus the perception of a translation as not original. The original was deemed superior to any versions, and any variation was a betrayal.

As the printing industry developed, the publishing of books became a commercial activity. The high demand for classic books in the vernacular language put pressure on translators to translate fast, and cheaply. Bassnett (ibid) feels that this led to them being despised as “hacks” who produced incompetent and sloppy unfaithful work. The translator had been relegated to a lesser position, paid accordingly and treated like a servant.” [3]

Judging by the source of the idea of unfaithfulness in translation, and by implication, of a certain manipulation, such ideas seem simply unfair and superficial. There is a great amount of work in order to transmit effectively the message of a text through translation. All the work of the translators in this case, in order to create a good translation, seems to go in the direction of successfully transmitting the message in the original text. A certain manipulation may be unintentional and just the result of the possibilities of language. However, we should also keep in mind whether the respective manipulation is significant, whether it impedes the communication of the original message, and whether it alters the readers’ perception.

Conclusions

We can say that Hermans was right, that there is indeed to some extent a manipulation of the meaning of the source text in the case of translations. However, how serious is such a manipulation? To what extent does it distort the original meaning? To what extent does it offer an understanding of the message of the source text? We notice an opposition between faithfulness on the one hand,

and distortion and manipulation on the other hand. Or is there such an opposition? It is true that there are certain changes that need to be made in a translation. However, as shown in this paper, some are inevitable judging by the possibilities of language. Cultures are also different. Dialects are different. Yet the readers should be given a translation which transmits, as much as possible, the message of the original. The main purpose of translations is the communication of the original message. Sometimes, however, adaptations must be made in order to convey the message of the source text to fit the understanding of readers coming from a different culture and who use a different language. When it comes to the poetic text, we notice an apparent opposition between faithfulness and linguistic potential. The translator does not stop at the level of language when he translates a poem; he also needs to consider how to achieve a similar effect on the reader as the original poem does. The translator's visibility or invisibility and domestication or foreignization are apparently sources of achieving manipulation. On many occasions, however, the so-called manipulation is unintentional. Translators try to find the best way to introduce readers into a different culture, and sometimes this happens by analogy with their own culture. They may diverge from the literal translation of a poem, and may be regarded as changing a poet's style, yet this is all done in an effort to achieve the same effect on the readers. There is a fine line between communication and manipulation. The only question is how strong manipulation is and what its effects are.

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