Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender Research
Vol. 8, No. 1 (Winter 2022)

The Translator's Paratext

Maya Zebdawi

Introduction

International agencies, NGOs, and refugee institutions are increasingly relying on bilingual refugees for various translation purposes. Many knowledge production organizations are also preferring the employment of refugee translators in contexts where original texts are written by refugees usually of the same nationality. This phenomenon, though not institutionalized or officially recognized as an approach to the translation of research and literature more broadly, should not be taken for granted without an attempt at questioning what those dynamics entail when it comes to the meaning being conveyed. Meaning is produced and moulded between languages and cultures, as it navigates different yet mutually inclusive mediums of knowledge production and identity formation. I stress that pairing knowledge with identity, seen as literature within the makings of translation, transforms language into an investigation of political structures (Amirdabbaghian and Kumaran 2020). Consequently, it may be subjective yet fair to assume that to become a translator as a refugee emanates more out of disgust with the way the poorer section of migrants, exiled, displaced, and workers are systematically oppressed and neglected, than out of any theoretical admiration for language and transculturation. Refugees become an embodiment (تجسيد) of the paratexts (النصوص المحاذية) in the contemporary industry of literature.

Translators who come from countries of the South – where ferocious ideologically-led fights against colonialism and its comprador classes of predecessors have been in play – present various notions of the concept of paratexts, all of which pertain to ideology and the practice/praxis of translation.

Translation, ideology, and paratexts; those concepts are intimately intertwined as translation is an *act* executed in specific temporal and cultural contexts. This contextualization of the act of transferal of meaning is, in and of itself, a milestone in the understanding of the ideology that defines the occupational foundation of the translator. At this point, the translator is transposed from being an executor of a *technocratic occupation* that utilizes language as a neutral medium of meaning *transferal*, into a *political actor* indulged in text *creation* through the space of language. Translation becomes a conscious labor that resolves to destroying, recreating, and challenging meaning within the parameters of time, language, and the medium of dissemination.

This labor and its constitutive parameters no longer succumb to an original vs. translated language dichotomy; they are rather a process of producing liminality (Kalua 2009). In other words, they generate and shape the features of epistemic in-betweenness that legitimizes the freedom to intervene in the structures and derivative meanings of the original text, delineating thus the third space (ibid.; Rutherford 1990) of literature. One embodiment of this liminality is the paratext.

Definitions of Paratexts

According to Wolf (2006), there are two types of paratexts: authorized and unauthorized. Unauthorized paratexts are the point of focus in this article. They could be defined as a textual and/or visual tool “added to

the source text" by personnel contributing to the production and distribution process of the soon-to-be publication. Those contributing personnel include painters, non-institutionalized writers, research subjects, guest writers, etc., the least recognized of all being translators (Wolf 2006). Contemplating and analyzing this communicative tool serves to understand the ideological and political agendas surrounding the release of a published text and its translation, as well as the role of the translator(s), editor(s), and/or publisher(s) in safeguarding these agendas (Genette 1997: 408). In other words, the paratext is "a methodological tool" employed by the translator as an agent (ibid.) to contextualize the act, or, at this point, the phenomenon of translation. When a consciously politicized approach is led essentially by translators, a paratext comes to be described as an agentic expression of the translator's self-conscious/subjective understanding of the discourse woven into and through the original text. It is a space where elements of an emotional, cultural, and historical antithesis of the original discourse could see light. In some reviews of the Persian translation of The Animal Farm (Amirdabbaghian and Kumaran 2020), the idea of translation as an antithesis (and a reappropriation of knowledge, discourse, and language) is expressed through a comparative method featuring the original and Farsi texts. The authors contextualized and explained the Persian "manipulations" of the original text from multipled viewpoints, and emphasized consequently how those manipulations were systematically aimed at addressing "… the emotions of his (the translator's) readers" (Al-Mohannadi, 2008: 88).

Drawing on that case study, we can say that these unique or more precisely peculiar attempts at utilizing linguistic ability outside the normative act of finding linguistic synonyms, transform *literature in translation* into an amplified question of self-understanding in its communal and political sense. It is a query that addresses culture through language in a geo-temporal limbo. At this point, the translator as an ideologizing agent comes about, and translation becomes essentially an act of willful appropriation.

Translators in contemporary academia often resort to Lefevere (1992) to define ideology in the translation context. The Belgian writer refers to ideology as "the conceptual grid that consists of opinions and attitudes deemed acceptable in a certain society at a certain time, and through which readers and translators approach text" (as cited in Hermans 1999: 127). The translation is thus an appropriation as such of discourse, and a process of confrontation that aims at taming either the source text or the target language with new literary constructs. Politics and power hegemonies are the meta fields in which translation work operates. This understanding of the act of translation transforms the entirety of the literary endeavor into, not a question of transculturation, but rather into a lively arena where "the dominant concept of what society should be or can be allowed to be" (Shuping 2013: 57) is prompted. This is where the notion of third space rises piercingly.

Exemplifying the Paratextual Paradigm

In their venture towards cementing an internationalist identity, the Beirut-based Palestinian liberation organization's Research Center (PRC) (1964-1982) decided to employ a constantly changing team of international comrades (فدائيين) to contribute to the Peritexts and Epitexts of their monthly literary and research issues Shu'oon Filistiniya. The peritexts included physical supplemental materials surrounding the

literary content of the edition. These were either publishers' peritexts or introductions and/or prefaces of "the author, or the translator in the case of a translation, or […] someone appropriate to present the text" (Neveu 2017: 28). So you would see a Mexican Zapatista drafting an introduction to Mahmoud Darwish's brand new prose on the antiregime war in Lebanon, or perhaps you will find an Edward Said commentary on an unnamed warrior's/fidaey published diaries. The liminality – in Kalua's 2009 sense – of these peritexts disturb the geo-cultural preoccupations of the produced literature through reproducing it into a third space that challenges the physical and political boundaries of war, checkpoints, refugee camp blockades, etc. Accordingly, a short story on Tal Al Zaatar massacre (1976) (Mandas 2021)[1] would become a lullaby of resistance in the streets of Harlem through the liminality of an epitext as a place of appropriation and recreation.

Colombian and Cuban painters would contribute similarly in the creation of a third space through peritexts that can include "front and back covers" (Genette 1997: 410). Through the employment of the paratext as a third space, the PRC was able to transcend the national/nation-state reality of its military fight into a language orientated towards its ideologically-sought liberation movement.

Translation: An Agentic Act

The contemplation of literature in translation, and translation as an ideological agentic act of transculturation cannot be considered a new endeavor. Hatim and Mason (1997: 161) state that "behind the systemic linguistic choices" made by a translator, there is "inevitably a prior classification of reality in ideological terms." The translator is a refugee/a migrant, in literary limbo. This means that ideology affects languages at both lexical-semantic and syntactic levels. Therefore, the writers resume by stating that "the translator's ideology influences both lexical choices and grammatical structures." In other words, ideological implications are an inevitability of form and content.

Apart from its neoliberalized understanding as an occupation of the middle classes, the translator is part of the social context, and "it is in this sense that translating is, in itself, an ideological activity" (Hatim and Mason 1997: 161). It is a rewriting with essential manipulation.

A Neoliberal Context

Since I mentioned the socio-economic mode of relations (i.e. neoliberalism), I have to clarify that the cultural context that the translator operates within is inevitably shaped by the governing structures of the knowledge production industry (i.e. the institutions in their economic and legal sense). Amirdabbaghian and Kumaran (2020: 83) elucidate that point impeccably:

[1] From a personal, unpublished interview with Hani Mandas, Beirut, 2021.

> the patronage of literary systems among powerful institutions as well as individuals comprises ideological, economic and also critical elements which tend to limit translators' poetological space; and the dominant poetics, frequently appointed by the professionals, who can dictate which works are to be translated and the style adopted.

That is where we reintegrate the social setting where the translator operates and where he/she interacts with publishers, editors, and agents who generally have more power. The mode of relations within that socio-institutional context dictates the nature of the relation between the translator and the discourse presented in the source text, and affects the translator's cognitive processes and development. This is also a mode of ideological translation – only one that is dictated by the modus operandi and not by the translation's agentic force. In this context, the notion of the third space comes to a state of dissonance.

Dissonance in translation and particularly journalistic and literary translations is the upshot of estrangement between the translator – or more particularly the act of translation (taking into consideration the various contextualizations presented earlier) – and the audience. This estrangement could and would most probably regenerate a state of alienation between literary/research discourse and public discourse. On this note, Al-Mohannadi (2008: 533) explains that ideological translations mostly depend on the translators' identification with their target audience and changing the text accordingly by "modifying the source text, even adding to or omitting from the original, to befit the standpoint of [their] readership." He adds that this phenomenon is but unavoidable with the translation of sensitive texts like religious ones or those expressing Marxist ideas, which "set out to advocate a particular way of life" (ibid.).

A question of purpose and authority

To borrow some of Salman Rushdie's (1991) reflections, it could be said that a refugee/emigrant translator translating migrant literature is on the edge of two languages, two realities, and two geographies. She/he experiences this in-betweenness in an intensified form. Language as transculturation is made more concrete by the physical, legal, and institutional fact of discontinuity. Meaning to this peculiar translator becomes a shaky edifice manipulated by the intention to "save the original text" (Levy 1969: 100) on the one hand and the ever-haunting will to shift cultural and hence ideological perception towards an act of adaptation and recreation on the other. In the hands of the translator, the narrative/discourse of the original text is in movement through his/her cultural temporality. With this approach, it becomes sound to ask whether the translation of literature should solely seek a reiteration of the foreign nuances and contexts of the original language, or if it is a war, in June Jordan's sense (Metres 2003) and a claim over meaning, literary production, and the uneven and combined nature of the knowledge production industry. Milan Kundera says that literature is "the struggle of man against power" (Kundera 1983: 30). It may as well be said that paratextual translation is the struggle of the underdog culture against the domestication of the literary language. A translator has the right to claim the original text as her culture's own. It is through this claim that we can move from a literary/knowledge production history of cultural transplantation to a history of ideologized transculturation.

In that regard, Irvine and Gal (2000: 402) explain that language ideologies are "the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them." Language ideologies are the cultural systems of ideas about social, political, moral, and linguistic relations (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994: 57). These definitions allow us to look at language ideologies, not as a technical linguistic question, but rather as cogs in "more basic ideological systems" (ibid.). Ideological systems may vary in shape; they could be preoccupied with elements of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, or even simply fraught geographies (linguistically translated as vernaculars and dialects), all shrouded in linguistic terms. The refugee/migrant translator and especially highly politicized refugees such as Kurdish, black, Kashmiri, Palestinian, and more specifically politically organized exiles and runaways,[2] all transform language into an arena constantly restructured by what Balockaite (2014: 42) describes as "…. a variety of unstated rules and regulations" in a diaspora that both "originates from social relations and also reflects them."

Those political migrants transform language from a *tool* of *transfer* to a *statement reflecting* power relations between the speakers of different social groups, as well as the state exposed to language ideologies.

Going back to the Iranian critique of the Farsi translations of the The Animal Farm, Hosseinzadeh (2003: 148) see that the state of "being deprived of the power of understanding and judgment" (as is the case of most of the animals at Manor Farm) serves as an advantage to the pigs to maintain power over the "lesser" animals. But that could also be construed in a positive sense, as the translator often comes from a state of social class in-betweenness that either gets utilized in the service of technocratic transferals of the host culture, or becomes a standpoint – a position to *steal* the labor of the prevalent literary industry *for* the source culture (the class-culture of the translator) that has been plagued with political, military, and most importantly epistemic violence.

This contrapuntal position allows the translator to become a robin hood of the sort that challenges what Hosseinzadeh describe as the "tricks" of history "… that first, trap the masses and force them into a rebellion with the promise of a utopia, and once the masses did their duty, they would rebuild the new lords" (2003: 146). This contrapuntal third space produces continuous opportunities for a new confrontation against the "new lords" of the literary market.

Conclusion

In order to study paratexts as a third space, it is not essential for the translators to profess allegiance to any specific political group or ideology. The idea of paratext and the third space highlights that the particular act of translation does not merely aim at protecting language (Islami 2003; Seyyedi 2013) and especially literature. Rather, it starts a roaring discussion and confrontation – a praxis so to speak – that fleshes out the

[2] For instance, communists, and most notably Iranian (Amirdabbaghian and Kumaran 2020), African (Kalua 2009), and Turkish (Ertürk and Serin 2016) activists.

political queries of literature across the uneven and combined literature industry ruling over the narratives of the North and the South, and the push-pull factors that entertain the movement of masses between and within them.

Paratext as a third space sets a humble introduction to the study of translations that were and are intended, subliminally or overtly, for those political migrants who live in the camps and the suburbs of the world – its geographical subalterns

References

Al-Mohannadi, S. 2008, "Translation and ideology." *Social semiotics*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 529-542.

Amirdabbaghian, A., and Kumaran, S. R. 2020. "Translation and Paratexts: A Study of Animal Farm in Persian." *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 80-95.

Balockaite, R. 2014. "On Ideology, Language, and Identity: Language Politics in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Lithuania." *Language Policy*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 41-61.

Ertürk, N., and Serin, Ö. 2016. "Marxism, Communism, and Translation: An Introduction." *boundary 2*, vol. 43, no. 3, pp. 1-26.

Genette, G. 1997. *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*. Translated by J. E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hatim, B., and Mason, I. 1997. *The Translator as Communicator*. London and New York: Routledge.

Hermans, T. 1999. *Translation in Systems: Descriptive and System-oriented Approaches Explained*. London and New York: Routledge

Hosseinzadeh, M. 2015. "Translatorial Prefaces: A Narrative Analysis Model." *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 311-319.

Irvine, J. T., and Gal, S. 2000. "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation." *Regimes of language: Ideologies, polities, and identities*. Edited by P. V. Kroskrity. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, pp. 35-84.

Islami, M. 1984 [2003]. درباره ترجمه های [About 1984 Translations]. Haft, p. 12-13.

Kalua, F. 2009. "Homi Bhaha's Third Space and African identity." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 23-32.

Kundera, M. 1983, *The book of Laughter and Forgetting*. London: Penguin Books.

Lefevere, A. 1992. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. London and New York: Routledge.

Levy, J. 1969. *Die literarische Übersetzung,Theorie einer Kunstgattung*. Frankfurt am Main-Bonn.

Metres, P. 2003. "June Jordan's War Against War." *Peace Review*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 171-177.

Neveu, A. 2017. "How Paratexts Influence the Reader's Experience of English Translations of La Fontaine's Fables." *New Voices in Translation Studies*, no. 16, pp. 23-54.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta in association with Penguin, 1992.

Rutherford, J. 1990. "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London, Lawrence and Wishart, 207-221.

Seyyedi, R. 2013. *The Ideological Perspective towards Literary Translation: A Discourse Analysis of George Orwell's 1984 (the novel) and Its Three English into Persian Translations*. Quchan, Razavi Khorasan, Iran: Islamic Azad University Master Dissertation.

Shuping, R. 2013. "Translation as Rewriting." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 3, no. 18, pp. 55-59.

Wolf, W. 2006. "Introduction: Frames, Framings, and Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media." *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*. Edited by W. Bernhart and W. Wolf. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 1-40.

Woolard, K. A., and Schieffelin, B. B. 1994. "Language Ideology." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 23, pp. 55-82.