Literary Translation

الترجمة الادبية

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4th stage/ Morning and Evening classes

Lecture 4: Poetry Translation

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**Understanding Poetry**

Talking about understanding poetry, we must be aware of the central two-fold approach to the rendering of poetry: it is necessary to know the "literal sense" as well as the symbolic or "the meaning" supposed to be understood by readers.

Many great efforts have been done to determine **what makes poetry distinctive from prose** which resulted in the development of poetics—the study of the aesthetics of poetry. Stating the difference between poem and prose, Cudden (1976) asserts that:

*“What makes a poem different from any other kind of composition is a sort of magic, the secret to which lies in the way the words lean upon each other, are linked and knitted by* ***sense*** *and* ***rhythm****, and a kind of tune whose beat and melody is different from that of prose”*

**Translating Poetry**

The first problem one encounters in attempting to translate poetry is **the importance of both its meaning and form**. Hence, the translator should make decision whether sacrifice the form for the meaning or vice versa. According to Nida & Taber (1964) :

*"The conflict between the form and content becomes especially important where the form of the message is highly specialized."*

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**” (Rose, 1981, p. 136). As it is evident translating poetry is a matter of relativity i.e. all aesthetic aspects of the original poem cannot be transferred into the TL version.

In the researchers' opinion, translators of literary texts, especially poetry, should at least possess some degree of artistic mastermind. There are different types of strategies which translators adopt for translating poetry. These strategies will be elaborated on below:

**1- Phonemic translation**

This type of translation which is more literal and faithful type of translation each phoneme is rendered to a phoneme in the target language. **This strategy is applied in languages which have similar phonemic systems** such as English and French, so it is very rare.

**2- Literal Translation: Stanza Imitation**

In this strategy the translator presents a literal rendering of the original poem. In other words **the translator tries to be faithful to the original content and also reproduce something of the form**.

**3- Metrical Translation**

The translator in this strategy tries to give a literal verse rendering of the content of the original poem and at the same time reproducing the **metrical pattern** of it.

**4- Translation Poetry into Prose**

The translator is not forced to follow the rhyming pattern or structure of the original poem. His only concern will be to **render the meaning of the poem in a fluent way**.

**5- Rhymed Translation**

In this strategy **meaning is sacrificed for the formal beauty**. The translator tries to produce a text which is based on the norms and conventions of the target culture.

**6- Blank verse translation**

In free blank verse translation the content is of primarily importance to the translator. If a translator uses this strategy, there is no need to be concern about formal features of such as rhyme, rhythm and etc.

**7- Interpretation Approach: Imitation**

Interpretation is the freest type of translation strategy for translating poetry. By applying this strategy, **the translator extracts the main concepts of the original poem and recreates it based on his/her style**. The other name of this strategy is "imitation".

**Poetry: into Poetry or into Prose**

For Jacobson, poetry is untranslatable be definition, and that only creative transposition is possible. The poet is able to see, hear and feel things that others cannot. The poet normally selects his/her words with much attention to their sounds and their aesthetic effects as well as their significance. There is a harmony between the sense and the sound in the poetic word thus the translator has to pay attention to the relation between each part and other constituent within the poem.

Despite the difficulties which accompanies poetry translation, excellent and acceptable translations of masterpieces of world poetry have been presented by a number of translators for example the translation of Shakespeare's Sonnet (18) by Hasan Hijazi and Safaa Kholousy:

*Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day*

*Thou art more lovely and more temperate*

A prose version of the sonnet would be:

*أبيوم من أيام الصيف أشبه*

*إنك اكثر جمالا و أشد اعتدالا*

* حسن حجازي

A poetic version would be:

منذا يقارن حسنك بصيف قد تجلى

و فتون سحرك قد بدت في ناظري أسمى و أغلى

* صفاء خلوصي

Both translators have attempted to preserve form and content as far as possible in order to transfer all the aesthetic aspects of the source text to the target text. Only one of them has attempted to transfer poetry into poetry. (Samuel Johnson, 1991) says "*Poetry cannot be translated*." On the other hand, there are some who don't accept the impossibility of poetry translation. For example Bashevis (1995), states that

*"Translation undresses a literary work, shows it in its true nakedness. An author can fool himself in his own language, but many of his shortcomings become clear to him in another language. Translation tells the bitter truth. It unveils all masks"*

Generally speaking, it is not justifiable to stop oneself from poetry translation, since poetry is the means of expression of one nation's feelings and attitudes toward world affairs. In this case translation can act as a bridging tool bringing closer different nations of the world. Dryden (1995) emphasized that poetry is translatable. He believed that to render a poem, the translator should be a thorough poet. In fact he used to pay much attention to the style, or formal features of the original poetry.

**Poetry and Culture**

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.

Since poetry is a means of expressing one nation's feelings and attitudes. Translation acts as a bridging tool through which different cultures can get closer to each other. For the Sonnet mentioned earlier one may suggest to substitute the word "*summer*" with the word "*spring*" since in English culture, or to be more specific, environment, "*summer*" is a very lovely season of the year unlike in Arabic world where it reflects hotness and uncomfortable temperatures of the year. The reader will be confused to read that the poet compares his lover's beauty to a summer's day. And here comes the translator's role in choosing a substitution that is equivalent to the original and reflects the same effect on the TL readers as that found on the source language reader:

*منذا يقارن حسنك بالربيع.. فحسنك أجمل و أعدل*

Some related definitions:

السوناتا الشعرية Sonnet:

قصيدة تتألف من أربعة عشر بيتا تتبع غالبا وزنا خماسي التفاعل من مقطع قصير يتبعه مقطع طويل نمط قافية ثابت.

يدعى ناظم السوناتا ب sonneteer.

قافية: rhyme

ترتيب القافية: rhyme scheme

ايقاع: rhythm

الوزن الشعري: meter

شعر: poetry

نثر: prose