CONSIDERING ETHICS IN TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

Ethics is one of the most significant matters which translation studies has been interested in recently. In this study, with reference to the early views to translation, and then to more recent approaches to it, translation and its development through time has been described. It has been shown that, there may be times when the translator may deviate from the faithful rendering of a source text. Moreover, it has been questioned if the translator has right to do any changes in the source text, whether it is always ethical to adapt or change the original text or not. In the end, it has been tried to prove that, there are times when it is not ethical to do changes or adaptations in translation of texts.

Key Words: Translation studies, adaptation, omission, ethics, skopos

Introduction

It has already been accepted by many translators and scholars that, considering the aim of translation and many other factors, the translator may prefer not to translate word for word, keeping in mind the cultural differences between the source text and target recipients, may adapt the text into the target culture recipients in order to make it comprehensible for them. For this reason, the translator may choose not to be one hundred percent loyal to the source text, linguistically. Moreover, it has been the major concern of the contemporary translators that they have been regarded as having secondary importance compared to the source text writers. Therefore, with the thought of lack of appreciation and professional recognition, some translators allege that they have the right to be visible, rather than stay invisible, and they reflect their own point of view, comment or ideology in their translations.

Although one finds the issues above rational, we cannot stop ourselves asking some questions like: Does it mean that, while translating, the translator can make "any" changes in the source text? Should there be a limit in the visibility of the translator, or amount of information added and omitted by the translator in the process of translation? Can the translator reflect his own point of view, although it doesn't exist in the source text, or does he have the right to mislead the reader? Should the translator have the opportunity to form the text thoroughly? I think that the answers to questions like these are directly related to the term "ethics" in translation, for this reason, it will be the main focus of my current study.

The aim of this study is then, firstly to go over the recent approaches to translation, then, with reference to these models, evaluate translation in terms of ethics and discuss the questions mentioned above, and finally, make clear when we can surely say that the translator breaks the ethical rules of translation. Before starting my discussion about ethics in translation studies, the reason for me to touch on some previous and recent approaches and concepts is that, I assume they will facilitate our understanding of translation since they enlighten translation and herewith ethical understanding in translation.

Early views to translation

The early views were basically linguistic approaches which perceived translation as a "code switching" activity. Translation was usually associated with word for word fidelity to the source text, although the result may not be considered satisfying, or appropriate for the intended purpose (Nord, 1997). In this study, I am not going to go back to years earlier and write about my concerns related to linguistic equivalence or of fidelity in translation. I will go beyond this, and concentrate on more recent approaches which have functionalist views of translation.

Resent Approaches to Translation

At the beginning of the 1970s, the focus wasn't the word or phrase anymore. The text became the focus of translation. Nevertheless, the major linguistic trend was not broken. In 1971, Katharina Reiss asserted that in real life we meet some situations where equivalence is not possible, not even desired. For

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example, when the target text aims to achieve a purpose or function, there is no need to focus on equivalence (Nord, 1997).

Another prominent functionalist, Hans J. Vermeer sees translation as a type of transfer, where both verbal and non-verbal signs are transferred. Therefore, translation is a type of human action. Each human action is intentional and purposeful and occurs in a given situation. Moreover, these situations are embedded in cultures. As a result, situations cannot be considered just as a transfer between languages. With the skopos (aim) of translation in his mind, the translator considers the addressee; the intended receiver or audience of the target text with their culture specific world-knowledge, their expectations and communicative needs and translates (Nord, 10-13) Under his prevailing circumstances, the translator does his best to reach his aim. While doing this, depending on his circumstances, the translator may deviate from a faithful rendering of a source text (Vermeer, 1996).

Justa Holz-Mantari, a German professional translator and scholar, instead of using the term "translation", she prefers to name it "message transmitter". In her model, translation is defined as "a complex action designed to achieve a particular purpose". The aim of "translational action" is to transfer messages across cultures (Nord, 1997).

Analysis of the Modern Theories

With reference to the modern functionalist theories, we have revised so far that, translation has a communicative purpose. Depending on their aim and circumstances, translators can take decisions and in order to achieve communication cross cultures, they can deviate from a faithful rendering of the original text.

Possible alterations that translation text may require

Depending on the aim of the translation, the translator may need to make some changes in the source text by omitting some words, phrases or parts, by making additions, by updating etc. Kamer Sertkan writes about different sociolinguistic requirements of different age groups. She compares children and adults and explains in her thesis that, sociolinguistic needs of children and adults are different. For this reason, while adapting a literary work to children, we need to recreate the message appropriate for their needs. For these reasons, such changes explained below could be made (2007).

- Omission: The elimination or reduction of a part of a text.
- Expansion: With this type of action, if the translator believes that there is an information which is implicit in the source text, to make it communicable for the target reader, the translator can add footnotes, glossary or explain it in the main text in order to make it easier to understand for the target reader.
- Updating: This is the replacement of the outdated, old-fashioned and obscure information in the source text with modern equivalents.
- Exoticism: The substitution of some culture specific words like slangs, dialects etc. in the source text by equivalents in the target text.
- Situational equivalence: If the translator thinks that there is a more familiar context than the one used in the source text, more suitable one can be inserted.

Reasons for ordering a translation text

In Andrew Chesterman and Emma Wagner's book which is in a form of dialogue between the two researchers, we can find four reasons for ordering a translation. The reasons which Chesterman and Wagner cited from Geoffrey-Samuelsson-Brown's *A Practical Guide for Translators* are as follows:

- Information
- Publication
- Advertising and marketing
- Litigation
- Text scanning and abstracting

I have already stated that the aim of the translation is very important and it determines the type of translation performed by the translator. Chesterman and Wagner also highlight in their book that, a translation for information and the one for publication are different. In a translation for information, there is a single or just a small group of people who want to know what the original text is about or what it says. They think that, once the reader finds out what he is looking for, he won't focus on the translation or its details. On the other hand, translations for publication should be revised and checked by a proof reader

because the reputation of the author and the publisher is very important. As to the legal translations, they claim, the translator carries great responsibility and quality control is a must (2002). In the end, once more we can conclude that, depending on its aim, there is not only one correct translation for a text, on the contrary, a text may have different translations.

After the presentation of the modern theories and the situations which call for alterations or different types of translations, some of the situations where modifications could be needed have been shown in previous parts. Although the changes stated in the previous parts may sound rational and necessary, unfortunately, those modifications have been made are not always ethical, there are times when they are unethical. I can also say for sure that, there is no discipline or profession that ethical issues don't appear. Therefore, translation studies is among them. Many scholars, researchers and translators have been concerned about the issue of ethics in translation and have touched on the subject "ethics".

Factors causing an unethical translation

Anthony Pym reminds us in her article that, as translators, we shouldn't forget that we are the representatives of the source text, or the writer. If something exists in the source text but it doesn't exist in the translated version, it is not ethical and also the translator is responsible and guilty for it (2001).

Andrew Chesterman also asserts that, if a translation "misinterprets" a source text, the result will be a prejudiced, biased, ideologically suspect version, and as a result, such a condition will have unethical consequences for the relations and perceptions of the source and target cultures. He states that, a good translator is like a good mirror, and as a good mirror does, a good translator should reflect the source text, or the source text's writers aim and the source culture in a faithful way. He sees the "ethical translator" as a mediator, whose responsibility is to work to achieve cross-cultural understanding (2001).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is also among the scholars who take ethics into consideration in translation. He touches on one very important matter: He alleges that, the translator should make an effort to "grasp" the writer's "presuppositions". He adds, translation is not only adjoining words which have the same meanings. He gives some examples to show the general problem. In one of his examples, he asserts that when Marx wrote about "commensurability" of all things, he meant "countless and simple". Translators who belonged to a different generation, misunderstood him, missed the point and caused the discussion to lose its value (2003).

Lawrence Venuti also has a strong assertion about translation. He alleges that translations may cause scandals and these scandals may be cultural, economic or political. He explains that, the linguistics oriented approaches were away from such scandals because they didn't consider social values. He thinks that these approaches have limitations in translation and such restrictions are most visible in literary translation. Their restrictions stem from being away from cultural and social formation. On the other hand, recently, the modern approaches aim to bridge the gap between the source and target cultures. Therefore, the source texts are domesticated inevitably; some certain domestic values are chosen and some are excluded and so various cultural and political effects are created automatically. As a consequence, these effects are likely to become scandals. Now that we see translations have far-reaching social effects, we should evaluate these effects by asking whether they are good or bad, or whether their results are ethical. At this point Venuti refers to Berman's concept of translation ethics. He clarifies that, according to Berman, a bad translation shapes the target culture toward an ethnocentric attitude. On the other hand, a good one is intended to restrict the ethnocentric negation. Finally, it is the translator, who will choose to credit or discredit ethnocentric movement (1998).

In her dissertation, E. Birkan Baydan, examines the list of Western classics recommended by the Turkish Ministry of Education for primary school children. This list, consisting of thirty literary works caused great impact in public with the thought that they were ideological distorted and the ideology behind these translations were the conservative religious ideology. With a more positive point of view towards ideology in translation, Baydan presents the case and the examples by saying that if someone believes there is an ideology behind a thinking, this is just because this person has opposite ideas, beliefs, perspectives or ideology, she also adds, there is no "ideology-free translation". Although translations may hold ideologies, I think that this ideology should be parallel to the ideology of the source text, otherwise, it will be distortion (2008).

Conclusion

The focus of the earlier studies used to be words, phrases, fidelity or loyalty. With the emergence of more modern theories, the concentration of translation has been changed. Communication between cultures, the aim of translation, the type of the text, social, religious and economic role of translation, modifications, alterations etc. became concepts researchers looked into. These topics brought along the term "ethics" in translation.

I admit that those factors could also play a role in producing an unethical translation, but they can also serve an ethical translation work. In this case, when does a translation become unethical? Here are some of the situations when it becomes unethical.

An unethical translation may emerge when the translator, misrepresents or misinterprets the source text

- has a biased, prejudiced or ideologically suspect version
- causes the source text to lose its value because of misinformation on purpose or by mistake
- evokes scandals by aggravating ethnocentric thoughts or ideologies.

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