

TRANSLATION POWER SUBVERSION



ROMÁN ÁLVAREZ & M. CARMEN-ÁFRICA VIDAL

TOPICS IN TRANSLATION

Series Editors: Susan Bassnett (*University of Warwick*)
and André Lefevere (*University of Texas, Austin*)

Editor for Annotated Texts for Translation: Beverly Adab (*Aston University, Birmingham*)

Editor for Translation in the Commercial Environment:
Geoffrey Samuelsson-Brown (*Aardvark Translation Services Ltd*)

Other Books in the Series

Annotated Texts for Translation: French – English
BEVERLY ADAB

Annotated Texts for Translation: English – French
BEVERLY ADAB

Linguistic Auditing
NIGEL REEVES and COLIN WRIGHT

Paragraphs on Translation
PETER NEWMARK

Practical Guide for Translators
GEOFFREY SAMUELSSON-BROWN

The Coming Industry of Teletranslation
MINAKO O'HAGAN

Other Books of Interest

About Translation
PETER NEWMARK

Cultural Functions of Translation
C. SCHÄFFNER and H. KELLY-HOLMES (eds)

Please contact us for the latest book information:
Multilingual Matters Ltd, Frankfurt Lodge, Clevedon Hall,
Victoria Road, Clevedon BS21 7SJ, England

TOPICS IN TRANSLATION 8

Series Editors: Susan Bassnett (*University of Warwick*) and
André Lefevere (*University of Texas, Austin*)

Translation, Power, Subversion

Edited by

Román Álvarez and M. Carmen-África Vidal

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS LTD
Clevedon • Philadelphia • Adelaide



Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Translation, Power, Subversion/Edited by Román Álvarez and M. Carmen África
Topics in Translation: 8

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Translating and interpreting--Social aspects. I. Alvarez, Román. II. Vidal, M. Carmen África. III. Series.

P306.2.T739 1996
418'.02--dc20 95-50708

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 1-85359-351-6 (hbk)

ISBN 1-85359-350-8 (pbk)

Multilingual Matters Ltd

UK: Frankfurt Lodge, Clevedon Hall, Victoria Road, Clevedon BS21 7SJ.

USA: 1900 Frost Road, Suite 101, Bristol, PA 19007, USA.

Australia: P.O. Box 6025, 95 Gilles Street, Adelaide, SA 5000, Australia.

Copyright © 1996 Román Álvarez and M. Carmen-África Vidal

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the publisher.

Typeset by Bookcraft, Stroud, Glos.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by WBC Book Manufacturers Ltd.

Contents

Acknowledgements	vi
1 Translating: A Political Act <i>Román Álvarez and M. Carmen-África Vidal</i>	1
2 The Meek or the Mighty: Reappraising the Role of the Translator <i>Susan Bassnett</i>	10
3 Norms and the Determination of Translation. A Theoretical Framework <i>Theo Hermans</i>	25
4 Culture-Specific Items in Translation <i>Javier Franco Aixelá</i>	52
5 The Exotic Space of Cultural Translation <i>Ovidio Carbonell</i>	79
6 Translation and Pragmatics <i>Enrique Alcaraz</i>	99
7 Translation, Counter-Culture, and <i>The Fifties</i> in the USA <i>Edwin Gentzler</i>	116
8 Translation and Canon Formation: Nine Decades of Drama in the United States <i>André Léfevere</i>	138
Notes on Contributors	156

Acknowledgements

The editors would like to express their gratitude to all the contributors in this book for their work, support and encouragement. Special thanks should be extended to Professors Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere for their sustained help with this project over the last two years, and for the much valuable criticism and advice they gave us. We are also grateful to Prof. Fernando Toda, who held the first chair in the area of Translation Studies in Spain at the University of Salamanca, for his lucid and perceptive comments on the contents of the book. The editors would also like to acknowledge their great indebtedness to Prof. Ramón López Ortega, whose annual Symposia on Translation at the University of Extremadura, attended by thousands of translators, teachers and students, did a great deal to develop the interest in this area in Spain.

R.A. and M.C.A.V.

1 Translating: A Political Act

ROMÁN ÁLVAREZ AND M. CARMEN-ÁFRICA VIDAL

Translation, as scholarship (to which it is integral), is a constant forward movement of approach to another cultural space. A constant movement, because real knowledge of the other culture is never achieved, be it at the linguistic or semiotic level. And a forward movement, because it implies a goal, the consecution of sufficient data of an ideal, abstract space which is linked with the progressive advance of the civilizational frontier. Any other space is therefore a shifty signified.

Lawrence Venuti

It could be said that throughout the second half of the twentieth century Translation Studies have evolved on the par with the changes and development of Western society and have been a reflection of them. As communications made the world smaller every day, the translator became more and more of a necessity. From the eagerness to consider translation as a science or the obsession to give a definitive, prescriptive and sole version of a text, we have moved on to a descriptive outlook which likewise, whether we like it or not, is political. As Susan Bassnett states in her essay in this book, at the end of the twentieth century the attitude towards translation has radically changed: 'Globally, this is the age of mass communications, of multi-media experiences and a world where audiences demand to share the latest text, be it film, song, or book simultaneously across cultures. Nor has the development of English as a world language slowed down the process of translation; it has, on the contrary served to emphasize the significance of translation, as questions of cultural politics appear on the agenda . . . the study and practice of translation is inevitably an exploration of power relationships within textual practice that reflect power structures within the wider cultural context.'

Translation has been one of the most representative paradigms of the clash between two cultures. Although excellent studies already exist on this function of translation – particularly stemming from the so-called ‘Manipulation School’ – there remains much work to be done with regard to the semiotic and hermeneutic problems translation poses. Contemporary studies on translation are aware of the need to examine in depth the relationship between the production of knowledge in a given culture and its transmission, relocation, and reinterpretation in the target culture. This obviously has to do with the production and ostentation of power and with the strategies used by this power in order to represent the other culture. Translation is *culture bound*. It makes us ponder, as Edward Said would put it, how knowledge that is non-dominative and non-coercive can be produced in a setting that is deeply inscribed with the politics, the considerations, the positions and the strategies of power. The translator can artificially create the reception context of a given text. He can be the authority who manipulates the culture, politics, literature, and their acceptance (or lack thereof) in the target culture. He may stay ‘behind the language of the original with its local densities, idiomatic variables, and historical-stylistic accident’. The translator views his source ‘often via an intermediate paraphrase, as a feature, almost non-linguistic, of landscape, reported custom, and simplified history’.¹ He knows that:

To experience difference, to feel the characteristic resistance and ‘materiality’ of that which differs, is to re-experience identity. One’s own space is mapped by what lies outside; it derives coherence, tactile configuration, from the pressure of the external. ‘Otherness’, particularly when it has the wealth and penetration of language, compels ‘presentness’ to stand clear.²

Therefore, he should ‘situate precisely and convey intact the “otherness” of the original’,³ but his knowledge of the target culture may not be used objectively. On the contrary, he may be influenced by the relationships of power that his culture maintains with the target culture. Obviously, cultural hegemony plays an important role in translation:⁴ ‘... an account of the accumulation of knowledge by one people about another is most unlikely to be the record of a progressive revelation of objective truth, achieved through the disinterested quest of learning for its own sake.’⁵ As Theo Hermans argues in his essay, translating is a matter of adjusting and manipulating a ST so as to bring the TT into line with a particular model and hence a particular correctness notion, and in so doing to secure social acceptance, even acclaim.

Approaching a culture inexorably implies beginning a process of translation. It is not merely a question of there being diverse institutional and cultural terms which pose evident translation problems⁶. Sometimes there is a void because something does not exist in the other culture or because it has a very different meaning or value (thus, the well-known example of 'Lamb of God' in the case of the Eskimos). In order for translation to exist, there must have been not only a perfect assimilation of the linguistic content, but also of the experience of the other culture, without the pressures of one 'superior' culture over another. As it is approached today, translation tackles some of the most important cultural problems: the death of what Lyotard has called the '*Grand Récits*'; the consequences of colonization in the interpretation of other cultures; the problems springing from the rebirth of xenophobia and racism; the understanding of the exotic, not in terms of false imaginary constructions, but as an historic reality in itself which must be respected disregarding hierarchical cultural boundaries. It could be said that translation is a provisional way to encounter the strangeness of languages, to paraphrase Benjamin, although it can also become a form of control, particularly if there are already a series of preconceived stereotypes about a given culture.

A characteristic example might be the translation of post-colonial literature – 'hybrid,' or 'métisse'" – in which the exotic discourse can be manipulated to such an extent as to conceive it, Edward Said argues,⁸ as an invented geography, an imaginary space built according to the ideology, cultural values and norms of the West – the Oriental orientalized – something as it should have been but not what it in fact is. When translating, one ego can be idealized, e.g. by selecting the vocabulary over another, by placing more emphasis on the familiar part of that culture or on its most exotic side; on that which makes us closer to it or 'superior': 'exotism' as opposed to 'naturalism'.⁹

It is no longer possible, therefore, to speak of a textual translation; rather, the context should always be born in mind because 'the opposition between "a contextual interpretation" and one that is not contextual is entirely spurious. Nothing has meaning "in isolation." The problem is always, what kind of context?'¹⁰ The problem is, indeed, what kind of context? Who chooses it? Why and how was it chosen? The answers to these questions have even changed many of the accepted ideas of translation theory.¹¹

The importance of the cultural milieu of each language is such that it could be argued that its significance cannot be found at a linguistic level (neither SL nor TL) but rather on a third level: in the cultural space that emerges from the clash (although, ideally, intersection) between the two

cultures; a cultural space that is usually as complex as it is conflicting. Translation is 'an integral part of the reading experience'.¹²

In these cases, the translator can become a true author, by determining what the implicit meanings of the final version are and also those of the original version: 'If the anthropological translator, like the analyst, has final authority in determining the subject's meanings – it is then the former who becomes *the real author* of the latter. In this view, "cultural translation" is a matter of determining implicit meanings'.¹³ For example, in *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* . . . the protagonist is a translator, Ermes Marana, who adulterates the translations as he pleases, manipulating the original texts. One of the assignments he is given has political implications. The young wife of a sultan married him on the condition that she would always be provided with the latest books written in Western countries, which she could read with ease. However, he begins to suspect that the guidelines for the beginnings of a revolution were being surreptitiously introduced between the lines of these novels since the sultana could not be deprived of them. The sultan knew that the conspirators were waiting for a signal from the sultana to begin, but that she had ordered no one to bother her while she was reading. In the light of this situation the translator, Ermes Marana, comes up with a strategy: the manipulation of the original text through translation with political ends. Therefore,

. . . he will interrupt the translation at one of its most gripping points and he will begin to translate another novel, inserting it into the first by any rudimentary means; for example, a character of the first novel opens a book and begins to read . . . Also, the second novel will be interrupted to make room for a third, which will not go far before it gives way to a fourth, and so on . . . Ermes Marana is like a snake that worms his evil way into the paradise of the prose . . . Here is a novel-cum-snare set by the disloyal translator with the beginnings of a novel left hanging . . . Like the rebellion, also left hanging, while the conspirators wait in vain to communicate with their illustrious accomplice . . .¹⁴

Translation always implies an unstable balance between the power one culture can exert over another. Translation is not the production of one text equivalent to another text, but rather a complex process of rewriting that runs parallel both to the overall view of language and of the 'Other' people have throughout history; and to the influences and the balance of power that exist between one culture and another. As Javier Franco states in his article, when translating we are confronted with four basic types of problems: linguistic, interpretive (those who have denied the possibility

that translation could become a science), pragmatic or intertextual (based on conventions of expression for each type of discourse, which are different for each society), and cultural (with its variant of historical distance). Every linguistic community also has its own set of values, norms, and classification systems which at times will differ from those of the target culture, and coincide with them at other times. According to Franco, this creates a factor of variability which the translator must somehow resolve, from the conservation and acceptance of the difference ('reading as an original,' as Toury calls it) to naturalization (which makes the other an equal), depending on the degree of tolerance.

Therefore, the translator's conduct will never be innocent and can lead to 'a labor of acculturation which domesticates the foreign text, making it intelligible and even familiar to the target-language reader, providing him or her with the narcissistic experience of recognizing his or her own cultural other'.¹⁵ Translation creates an image of the original, particularly for those who have no access to the reality of that original. This image can undoubtedly be very different from the truth, insofar as the translator can distort and manipulate reality, because he is under the pressure of a series of constraints (which Lefevere denotes as ideological, poetical and economic), typical of the culture to which he belongs.

Therefore it is important to acknowledge the consequences of manipulating the language and the problem of abuse of power that translation can give rise to. From all this, the importance of knowing what is being rewritten and how it is rewritten stands out¹⁶ (what is translated; what is included in literary anthologies; what is taught in the history of literature), insofar as the idea that the non-professional reader of a given culture will form will be that provided by literary critics, translators and compilers. One must be on one's guard as, according to Lefevere, all rewriting implies manipulation, whether conscious or unconscious, of the original.¹⁷

If we are aware that translating is not merely passing from one text to another, transferring words from one container to another, but rather transporting one entire culture to another with all that this entails, we realize just how important it is to be conscious of the ideology that underlies a translation. It is essential to know what the translator has added, what he has left out, the words he has chosen, and how he has placed them. Because behind every one of his selections there is a voluntary act that reveals his history and the socio-political milieu that surrounds him; in other words, his own culture.

Translation is an excellent vehicle for conveying the typically Foucaultian binary essence of the opposition power/knowledge: power is

intimately related to knowledge, information, and especially to the manner in which that information is conveyed and the way of articulating a wide range of discursive elements in the TT which behave according to extremely subtle strategies.

At a historical period characterized by manipulation, as Robert Scholes states in *Textual Power*, one must ask oneself – in a Foucaultian manner – what is so dangerous about the fact that people speak and that their discourse proliferates indefinitely. It is important to be aware of this manipulation and to try ‘to see through the manipulations of all sorts of texts in all sorts of media’¹⁸ as far as possible. One should be aware that ‘translating aspects of one culture into another is never a simple semantic substitution. Rather, the self-images of two cultures come to bear on the matter and clash over it . . . Translations, therefore, can teach us much about certain aspects of a culture at certain stages of its evolution’.¹⁹

Translators are constrained in many ways: by their own ideology; by their feelings of superiority or inferiority towards the language in which they are writing the text being translated; by the prevailing poetical rules at that time; by the very language in which the texts they are translating is written; by what the dominant institutions and ideology expect of them; by the public for whom the translation is intended. The translation itself will depend upon all of these factors.

The essays compiled for this book deal with all of these aspects and many more. Susan Bassnett, for example, gives a retrospective view of the figure of the translator who has been so mistreated over the centuries. As opposed to the old idea of ‘the translator as a betrayer of the pure source text’, recent translation theory ‘has stressed the vital role of the translator in the interpretative process.’ The translator is essential during the process of exchange and interchange that takes place when translating. With the author, the original also dies. With the appearance of polysystem theory, translation takes on a principal role in shaping the literary polysystem and assumes an important subversive power which can be illustrated by examples of translations of the Bible and in texts related to post-colonialism and feminism. One must bear in mind ‘how the translation ensures the continuity of the source text, in direct contrast to the old notion of the translation as a diminution of the source, or betrayal of it. Translation therefore becomes the act that ensures the life of the text and guarantees its survival. Far from traducing the pure original, the translation injects new life blood into a text bringing it to the attention of a new world of readers in a different language.’ According to Bassnett, the key word in the

90s is 'visibility.' Today translation is a process in which intervention is crucial; the role of the translator is 'very visible indeed.'

Theo Hermans writes on the social aspects of translation norms. Starting from the observation that norms are social as well as psychological realities, his essay goes on to discuss norms as part and parcel of the power structures in societies. Individuals or groups may, depending on their position in the system and the goals they wish to achieve, follow dominant norms or deviate from them, or attempt to subvert them. Norms are particularly relevant to translation, as they show how a culture, or elements within it, regulate both the import and export of cultural goods.

In his study, Javier Franco concentrates, from a descriptive point of view, on the nature of culture-specific items in translation and applies his approach to a study of their manipulation in several translations into Spanish of *The Maltese Falcon*. Ovidio Carbonell analyses the question of the 'Other' in connection with translation, with special reference to Islam. Enrique Alcaraz writes on Pragmatics and Translation from the perspective of linguistic manipulation. Edwin Gentzler is involved with Michel de Certeau's ideas about the 'practice' of everyday life and their viability as a model for locating the subversive aspect of translations in the larger framework of social interaction. He gives examples from both Merwin's translations of early Spanish ballads and Bly's translations of poets such as Neruda, Machado and Jiménez, arriving at the conclusion that in these cases they demonstrate that at times the 'weak' culture can influence the 'strong' one. Finally, André Lefevere ponders how translation influences and has influenced the construction of a literary canon, using examples from the corpus of drama anthologies published in the US between 1900 and 1988.

What all of these essays seem to have in common is an approach to translation as a factor that shapes the way in which a given society receives a work, an author, a literature, or a culture: '... like all (re)writings,' Bassnett and Lefevere state in *Translation, History and Culture*, '[translation] is never innocent. There is always a context in which the translation takes place, always a history from which a text emerges and into which a text is transposed.' It is no longer possible to limit oneself to the word as a translation unit; one must take into consideration both the original and target cultures with which the translator is connected. He must be aware that all use of language implies manipulation and that therefore the result of this action could either be a Barthesian 'enratic' discourse (which proliferates within the power) or an 'acritic' one (which proliferates outside of it). The important thing is to confirm the tolerance of the

language of the translator when assimilating the 'Other'. We must analyse 'how power enters into the process of "cultural translation," seen both as a discursive and as a non-discursive practice'.²⁰ It is a question of making clear that the subject who speaks and translates is not as responsible for what he or she says as for *what s/he does not say and how s/he says it*.

Notes

1. George Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976 [1975]), p. 380. For a critique of Steiner's point, see Samia Mehrez, 'Translation and the Postcolonial Experience: The Francophone North African Text,' in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *Rethinking Translation. Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 121.
2. Steiner, *op. cit.*, p. 381.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 413.
4. Cf. Richard Jacquemond, 'Translation and Cultural Hegemony,' in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *Rethinking Translation. Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, pp. 139–158.
5. P.J. Marshall, 'Taming the Exotic: The British and India in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,' in G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (eds), *Exoticism in the Enlightenment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 52.
6. Cf. Peter Newmark, *Approaches to Translation* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981), pp. 70–83.
7. So called 'because of the culturo-linguistic layering which exists within them.' This kind of literature has managed to create 'a new language that defies the very notion of a "foreign" text that can be readily translatable into another language. With this literature we can no longer merely concern ourselves with conventional notions of linguistic equivalence, or ideas of loss and gain which have long been a consideration in translation theory. For these texts written by postcolonial bilingual subjects create a language "in between" and therefore come to occupy a space "in between." In most cases, the challenge of such space "in between" has been double: these texts seek to decolonize themselves from two oppressors at once, namely the western ex-colonizer who naively boasts of their existence and ultimately recuperates them and the "traditional," "national," cultures which shortsightedly deny their importance and consequently marginalize them.' Samia Mehrez, 'Translation and the Postcolonial Experience: The Francophone North African Text,' in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *Rethinking Translation. Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, p. 121.
8. Cf. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1991 [1978]), pp. 66–68.
9. Cf. Richard Jacquemond, 'Translation and Cultural Hegemony: The Case of French-Arabic Translation,' in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, p. 150.
10. Talal Asad, 'The Concept of Cultural Translation,' in James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 148.
11. Cf. Samia Mehrez, 'Translation and the Postcolonial Experience: The Francophone North African Text,' in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *Rethinking Translation. Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, p. 121.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

13. Talal Asad, 'The Meaning of Translation,' in *Writing Culture*, p. 162.
14. Italo Calvino, *Si una noche de invierno un viajero . . .* (Madrid: Siruela, 1989), pp. 143–144 (our translation).
15. Venuti, 'Introduction,' *Rethinking Translation*, p. 5.
16. Cf. M. Carmen África Vidal, 'Traducir por la izquierda', *Ensayos sobre traducción*, Ramón López Ortega, ed. (Cáceres: Universidad de Extremadura, 1994).
17. Cf. André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1–10.
18. Robert Scholes, *Textual Power* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 15.
19. André Lefevere, 'Holy Garbage, tho' by Homer cook't', *Traduction, terminologie, redaction* 1, 2 (1988), p. 26.
20. Talal Asad, 'The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology,' in James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, p. 163.